
Visions of the Roman North

Art and Identity in Northern Roman Britain

Iain Ferris



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ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion

18-24 Middle Way

Summertown

Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-905-0

ISBN 978-1-78969-906-7 (e-Pdf)

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To Tony Sanderson and all those who worked at Binchester for keeping the faith.

Acknowledgements

In writing this book I have received help from a number of individuals and organisations and I would like to take the opportunity to sincerely thank them all here.

Part of the discussion on the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs in this book derives from a paper co-authored with Professor David Breeze who encouraged me to write about these artworks again.

For providing data about her forthcoming *CSIR* volume I heartily thank Lindsay Allason-Jones who answered my queries with her usual good grace. Dick Brewer was equally helpful in answering a number of queries during the recent lockdown when I could not visit the academic libraries that I usually frequent. Again, during lockdown, Dr Pete Wilson patiently checked catalogue entries for me in a book in his home library which I could not get out to consult: I had not actually realised at the time quite how much work I was asking him to do, so am very grateful for the information supplied in full. Dr Fraser Hunter of the National Museums of Scotland again was most helpful in answering email correspondence. Adam Parker of the Yorkshire Museum very kindly let me read his paper on phallic imagery in the north ahead of publication. Jane McComish of York Archaeological Trust quickly answered a query about finds of building material in the city, Dr Philippa Walton answered a query about coins from Piercebridge, and Dr Ben Croxford, Sally Worrell, and Dr John Pearce answered queries about bronze statue fragments from the north.

For providing images for reproduction in the book I would like to thank: Professor Simon James of Leicester University; Professor Ian Haynes of Newcastle University and Jane Laskey of the Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport; Professor David Breeze; Dr David Petts of Durham University; Jon Allison; Nick Robinson of Ilkley Manor House Museum and the Trustees of Ilkley Manor House Trust; Dr Fraser Hunter of the National Museums of Scotland; Dr Barbara Birley of the Vindolanda Trust; Ciara Clarke of AOC Archaeology; Dr Jeremy Evans; Historic England; Malton Museum; Tullie House Museum, Carlisle; Dr Philippa Walton of Reading University; Dr Louisa Campbell of the University of Glasgow; Cath Ross and Northern Archaeological Associates; Studio HB; Carole Raddato; John Boyd-Brent; Deborah Mayers; Dr Joanne Ball; Andrew Parkin of the Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle; and Alex Croom of Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum, South Shields. I must also thank the British Museum and the York Museums Trust for the creation of their wonderful web-based image research resources and for their incredibly generous facility for researchers and academics to make use of these images without charge, as I have done with a number of images in this book. Julian Parker once more gave a huge amount of help in locating a number of images for the book and is thanked for his technical expertise in turning old colour slides into sharp digital images.

The staff of the Institute of Classical Studies Library, London, the British Library, London, and Swansea University library were unfailingly helpful in obtaining books and journals for my reference while researching this book. Many thanks to them all.

As always, my colleague and wife Dr Lynne Bevan read and commented on a draft of the book, much to the benefit of the finished work. At Archaeopress I would like to thank Dr David Davison for commissioning this book in the first place and Mike Schurer for his editorial work and advice in seeing the book into print and Robin Orlić for page-setting the text. Professor Martin Henig in his role as specialist reader of the manuscript for Archaeopress is thanked for his kind comments and enthusiasm, and for his more specific feedback on a small number of issues in the text.

Preface

This study is not concerned with the minutiae of the history of the northern frontiers of Roman Britain, or with military dispositions and the history of individual military installations there, interesting and crucial though these topics are. Rather it is concerned with the role of images and art in the northern region in the Roman period and how art and identity interacted together here, about what will be argued to have been a distinct visual culture in northern Roman Britain. In order to bring out the nature of this distinctiveness I have attempted to explain why it was unique in terms of what kind of art was produced and consumed here, while emphasising issues of ambiguity and complexity. This is to some degree a kind of historical reportage, yet it is a narrative cognisant of the artifice at the heart of all art. But I have also made use of numerous published catalogues of different types of artworks from Roman Britain to produce a quantified or at least semi-quantified profile of cultural production and consumption in the Roman north which, I will argue, helps towards proposing a definition of its artistic identity. Totals and percentages are alien to most art historical studies, and I have generally previously shied away from discussing ancient art in such cold numerical terms, but I hope readers will find the presentation of such figures here useful in placing the art of the Roman north into a broader context and allowing it to be seen in perspective.

Many of the artworks presented as images in this book are rightly very well known, and indeed are canonical pieces in the overall study of Romano-British art. However, I have also tried to introduce images of lesser known artefacts, such as the Binchester jet dog and the Piercebridge head pot, to provide a fuller picture of the visual culture of the region. For the same reason I have also sought out images of objects recovered by excavation or serendipity in this present millennium, such as the Cramond Lioness, the Catterick phallus, the new Gelt Forest *graffiti*, and the Inveresk Sol altar, some not yet fully published, in order to demonstrate the dynamics of archaeological discovery and research in the region.

Unlike in the majority of my previous books I have chosen here not to encumber the text with academic notes, as I am largely presenting here my own thoughts on the uniqueness of the art from northern Roman Britain in the form of an extended essay. As a result, I am hoping that the book will provide a kind of guide for those visiting the museums of the region or those studying its art who often do not want to navigate the full academic history of the study of the objects they are seeing but who want to be sufficiently informed to contextualise the artworks on display there. For the same reason, I have not produced a full bibliography on the art and archaeology of northern Roman Britain but rather a short set of lists of potential further reading directly relevant to the subject in hand. If in the body of the main text I have named a specific academic or researcher who has promoted a particular interpretation of an

artwork or artworks the relevant books or papers by that author will appear in the further reading section.

When I look at the art from northern Roman Britain I do not just see *the past*, but also *my own past* too for various reasons. It is projected into the present, and through this book into the future. This extended essay on art could just as well have been a memoir of sorts. Though I was born and grew up in London, my family roots on both sides lie in northern Britain, my mother's family coming from Whitby in north Yorkshire and my father's from Montrose in east Scotland. For five years in the late 1970s to early 1980s I lived and worked in the north-east of England and on numerous occasions in that period I visited the Roman sites and museums of the region with my then girlfriend Louisa who drove us around each weekend. Though intrigued and fascinated by the art I saw then I did not realise that I had gone beyond my limits of experience and that I would have to return much much later to finally understand what I had seen. In order to research this book in late 2019 and early 2020 I visited many of the same sites and museums again, fortuitously before the imposition of our unprecedented national lockdown. I had never thought that I would somehow come to be a tourist in my own life, but then again it is true to say that one can only really rediscover other people in the past by consciously rediscovering oneself. At times I had the impression I was walking into myself, into some part of my own past.

Iain Ferris

Pembrey

November 2019-November 2020

Chapter One

A Land Apart

In any study, before description and discussion must come definition and the demarcation of boundaries. For the purposes of this present book northern Roman Britain has been defined as all of that area lying to the north of a line connecting Chester to York and the continuation of that line eastwards across to the North Sea coast which at one time lay within the boundaries of the Roman empire or which the Romans attempted to bring within the empire.

From AD 122 the northern frontier of the province was literally imposed on the landscape here, in the form of Hadrian's Wall, running across the Tyne-Solway isthmus and with the defensive system continuing down the Cumbrian coast. Military campaigns had taken place in Scotland before that date, and victories had been won, including the famous one at *Mons Graupius* in AD 83 or 84, but in the end the occupation of parts of the country had not been sustainable. However, under the emperor Antoninus Pius, who came to the imperial throne in AD 138, the reoccupation of lowland Scotland led to the establishment of a new northern frontier, the Antonine Wall, in AD 142-143. That new frontier only lasted for twenty years or so, with the Roman provincial frontier boundary reverting back to the line of Hadrian's Wall which then retained its boundary function right up to the official ending of the Roman administration of Britain in AD 410. However, major campaigns were launched in Scotland by the Romans again in AD 209 and 210 under the direct command of the emperor Septimius Severus and his two sons Caracalla and Geta. Fort building and fort reoccupation took place in Scotland at this time. The death of Severus at York in AD 211 more or less brought this partial Roman reoccupation of parts of Scotland to an end after Caracalla's final foray north in AD 211-212. Apart from some minor forays into Scotland against the Picts in later years, contact between Roman Britain and the peoples of Scotland took place only on an economic and diplomatic level.

The tribal area or *civitas* became the organisational unit for the governance of Roman Britain, with Aldborough being the *civitas* capital for the northern region of the Brigantes people. The grid of governance in the north was far more complex though than in most other regions of *Britannia* because of the huge military presence here throughout the whole Roman period, with York, the site of a legionary fortress and later a veterans' *colonia*, to a great extent more-or-less eclipsing Aldborough in terms of political importance. This process was completed when York became the designated capital of *Britannia Inferior* as part of the Severan reforms in or around AD 197 and later the capital of *Britannia Secunda* after Diocletian's reforms of AD 296. To further complicate matters, it would appear that by the third century AD Corbridge,

in the east of the Hadrian's Wall frontier zone, and Carlisle in the west, both also were designated as *civitas* capitals.

The Roman north as defined in this present study would have taken in most of the territory of the Brigantes, possibly the northernmost part of the territory of the Parisi, and all of the territory of the Carvetii, while in Scotland large parts of the territories of the Novantae, the Selgovae, the Dumnonii, and the Votadini were occupied for a short time. While the geographical disposition of fortresses and forts probably reflected the reality of tribal dispositions and boundaries, the two northern frontier lines undoubtedly were overlain on the landscape and interrupted traditional territorial integrity, being topographically rather than ideologically designed. However, there is no doubt that tribal identity would seem to have remained an important factor and focus for identity in the northern military zone long after its establishment. For instance, the tombstone of Regina found at South Shields, dating to the second half of the second century AD, is a case in point, in that the dedicatory inscription is at evident pains to inform the viewer or reader that she was Catuvellaunian in origin, that is from one of the major tribal groups or regions of southern Britain. A woman from the Cornovii of the English midlands has her origins recorded on her tombstone at Ilkley, West Yorkshire in the late first or early second century AD. Again, the inscribed so-called *civitas* stones of Hadrian's Wall represent a curious kind of paradox, that is the formal recording of building work on parts of the frontier undertaken by civilian cadres from the southern zones of the province, and could date from the second half of the second century AD or the third century, or could even be as late as the fourth century. There is no academic consensus on their date.

However, this book is not concerned with the fine details of the chronology and history of the northern frontiers of the Roman province or of the shifting military dispositions there. The history of individual military installations in the north is not discussed either, except in passing. Rather the study is concerned with the role of images and art in the region and how art and identity interacted together here, producing what will be argued to have been a highly-distinctive visual culture in northern Roman Britain. Much writing about the Roman north often is caught up in a relentless specificity—*this* site, *this* building, *this* find—and shies away from the idea of overview. Forward motion and meaning can thus become subsumed in descriptive practice.

It will also briefly be considered whether objects and images played any role in disseminating Roman ideas beyond the frontiers, and whether what today might be termed cultural soft power was at all deliberately employed across the borders. Numerous objects found their way into non-Roman territory beyond the frontier, items such as the famous Turriff glass jug for instance, along with coins, tableware, and brooches, some of them undoubtedly traded but some likely to have been given as diplomatic gifts from the Roman authorities to local tribal leaders or offered as bribes to the same elite class. Discussion of contact between the authorities of Roman Britain

with leaders of tribal groupings with independent cultures of their own constitutes a topic for another, separate study.

Regional studies of Roman Britain have a long history, going back to the classic Duckworth *Peoples of Roman Britain* series of the 1970s (taken up by Sutton in the 1980s), for which Brian Hartley produced a slim volume on the Brigantes of the north in 1988. Studies of the Roman north in particular are part of an even longer tradition going back to the days of J. Collingwood Bruce and his groundbreaking publications *The Roman Wall* of 1851 and *The Hand-Book of the Roman Wall* in its first edition of 1863. However, many of these studies were largely concerned with military archaeology, and considerations of art in these volumes are often generally incidental. It is for that reason that the present book has been written, with a view to placing the art of northern Roman Britain at the centre of discussion. Questions will be asked of this body of art. Is there a distinctive regional art here? If so, why and how is it distinctive? Can the art propose a way to understand the region? A few years ago, in 2007, Roger White argued in his book on *Britannia Prima* that the south-western parts of Roman Britain developed a highly-distinctive identity and art, but such a view has not generally been taken with regard to the Roman north. However, there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that the north did indeed itself possess a cultural distinctiveness which had a great deal to do with the development of artistic practices in the region which acted as the means by which culture here became an expression of the identities of the peoples of the region.

Academics are happy to accept that there were regional types of brooches in northern Roman Britain, with, for example, there being a higher proportion of plate and penannular brooch types in the north than in the rest of the province. Indeed, it is accepted that northern variants were also made on indigenous-tradition sites in Scotland as well. Regional variations of types of Romanised items such as toilet implements and nail cleaners have been recognised in the province. Both brooches and toilet implements are types of objects which related to the presentation and maintenance of the body, and thus stylistic variations might even imply regional differences in thinking about the body and the self in contemporary society. Identity, material culture, and art were all somehow ideologically interlinked at the time.

Art forms part of a suite of things that helped facilitate and create the transition of a rural northern region centred on its villages and farmsteads to a militarised landscape of fortresses, forts, and frontier works, though still supported by farms whose production was geared up to supply the new market, and with civilian settlements in the form of the *civitas capital*, some small towns, and *vici* or civilian settlements growing up outside the forts. Thus it might be thought that the art of the Roman north was the art of a region fundamentally and crucially empty of images of a large proportion of its existing inhabitants, save soldiers and their gods, but this would be wrong as non-military individuals are represented in the art of the region as well,

as we shall see. Mapping diachronic change might allow us to question how art here represented at different times a reaction to external events and broader cultural or ideological currents, both in the political sphere and the social. But art is not always necessarily *about* an event. Sometimes it was the event.

This book is to some extent a long essay, a series of interconnected studies of particular aspects of identity formation explored by material objects, highlighting the dominant strands of artistic practice at the time. The roots of this practice are not explicitly explored, indeed only in so far as they can be seen to have reinvigorated and tested the potential of sculpture as a medium. The interworking of agency, gesture, and landscape make this very much a regional study. Looking at the art from the Roman north helps us to understand how this geographic space was conceptualized. People, materials, and environment served to emphasise the local context and the landscape acted as a medium through which agency and gestures were translated. The art of the region should be seen as the end result of active engagements with developing patterns of change which formed one crucial aspect of the contemporary experience. Art acted as a kind of mesh through which real life escaped, the overall assemblage of artworks being somehow greater than the sum of its many parts. By deploying new modes of representation it will be argued that it is almost as if the Romans looked down on the northern landscapes which had not been seen in this way before and reinterpreted them through imagery. Looking at this art allows us to recognise the deep connection between social and geological territory, and between landscape and memory. I will also argue that northern Romano-British art between the first and early fifth centuries AD was in a sense a period of sufficient historical integrity to make it worthy of study in its own right and not just as a regional study. This art helped in the creation of a discrete social and psychological space in the north. The study seeks to question conventional polarities with regard to province and frontier. But there nevertheless remains a feeling that these resulting new visual narratives ultimately longed for some degree of constancy and integration in a broader whole. There is a sense that there was a struggle under way to envisage a new politicised landscape effortlessly spanning both the past and the present. The question is whether the art produced ultimately succeeded in doing so entirely successfully?

The visual experience was after all a vital and integral part of the character of the region as it was shaped by broad cultural and sociopolitical forces. Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall did not exist in a void: they lay within a broader landscape. The frontiers existed at a critical point where history and geography, architecture and topography met, or at least intersected; a region of perpetual exchange where economic, cultural, and political currents met in a zone of both contact and ideological, rather than actual, conflict. Perception and interpretation in such a zone can be, but need not necessarily have been, the same thing. Art and culture ultimately became the main arteries of connectivity and communication, drawing on repertoires of extraction and mobilisation.

This bold and innovative art consequently made its own map of the region in a cartography of consequences whose transitory nature defied the rational lines and grids of conventional map-making. Conventional maps of northern Roman Britain would simply have failed to capture the essence and specifics of artistic production and consumption there at that time and consequently would have missed more than they managed to record. The northern landscapes should be understood as both physical and social spaces. The Antonine Wall distance slabs, discussed at great length later in the book, are an exception, a series of conceits of uncommon force. They demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that as a means of expanding rather than circumscribing ideological practice art and craft were media for the exchange of different knowledge systems at the frontier. Contested borders and contested identities to some extent helped decentre the image of the human body here. In the event, abandonment of the Antonine frontier led to the sacrificing of the correspondence between art and fixed historical narratives in favour of a new fluidity.

Both artists and viewers experienced an alternative world to that created by historical writers on the province, a world that they themselves were creating and perpetuating. In many ways then this study marks an attempt to connect with a cognitive map of the northern region from the perspective of its cultural production over time. This kind of cartography could lead to all sorts of consequences, most importantly by allowing the art discussed to bring its past with it. This art was not just *something to look at*: it was communicative, performative, and constructive, and sometimes dwelled on its own form and formative power.

Almost accidentally and coincidentally the most essential part of the whole process over time was the continual and endless mapping of spots which clustered around the playing-out of the most culturally-significant moments. These spots were highly-desirable locations for art, defined as they were by their high visibility, their potential audience of viewers, and their cultural meaning. Each individual artwork and each spot at which art appeared contributed towards a constant remapping of the Roman roads and route-ways, the fortresses, forts, towns, and *vici* of the region along ever-shifting coordinates of physical access, cultural status, public visibility, and the opportunities and sometimes dangers offered up by the political and ideological backdrop against which life then was experienced.

But we should exhibit caution and try not to see northern Romano-British art as a static, unchanging genre tied in to the values and assumptions of its commissioners, creators, and patrons. Things changed over time as they did according to context. Different viewers would have had different experiences of the same artwork. Northern Romano-British art rather would appear to have represented a fragmented and sometimes seemingly chaotic experience as opposed to what might alternatively be thought of as an overly-regulated and systematised one. The aim of the art seems to have been to reconcile the ideas of its commissioners with the things they saw. We

perhaps need to try to think of the Roman northern region in the same way that its artists did.

The sense of the frontier as contributing towards a narrative of isolation and division is probably mistaken. The administrative role of many of the military installations would have probably meant that more pacific and commercial dimensions to life there informed the cultural output and consumption locally and regionally. We should perhaps not necessarily see a frontier as a line on a map or on the ground marking a boundary, but as a mark defining a zone of managed interaction. We need to remember how the Romans themselves used the *pomerium* as a conceptual marker between the city of Rome and the outside world.

Can we write of a frontier mentality, an existential anxiety naturally born of subsumed tension and expressed through art, a totemic act produced in a climate of perpetual uncertainty? Certainly we can probably find in the art evidence of the inevitable tensions that must have arisen between the ordinary soldier's life and contemporary political discourse as reflected in changing military dispositions and a fluctuating frontier for some of the period under consideration. The Roman army's actions required both political and religious approval to be considered just and right. Life and pictorial art interacted, influences working in both directions. As already mentioned, the *civitas* stones of Hadrian's Wall represent a paradox, linking civilian endeavour to military and political ideology in what might mistakenly have been thought to have been a restricted or liminal zone of the province.

The very specific socio-geographic location of the northern zone must inevitably have led to a tension between isolation and connectivity with the rest of the province and with the wider Roman world. The northern British networks were formed out of a predisposition in the region towards insularity, change, and resilience, dictated, but not necessarily promoted, by the very nature of the overwhelming military and administrative presence here. The question of integration will arise again and again in this study. The strong community identity in the region became a crucial factor in the levels of resilience here and dictated how the culture and the art of the region grew to be individualised and potent. The tensions between local developments and their supra-regional embedding were played out through the commissioning of artworks which foregrounded group or individual identities.

It is interesting that curatorial and museological practice in the northern region is reflected in both the very large number of local and site museums at which the story of the Roman presence in each area is given narrative local specificity (Figure 1) and in the admirable move that has been made towards the presentation of the whole area's Roman history in terms of its connectivity to the history of other frontier zones elsewhere in the empire. The Unesco designation of the trans-national Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (WHS), alongside individual WHS designations for



Figure 1 Group of Mithraic artworks on display in the Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

Hadrian's Wall in 1987 and the Antonine Wall in 2008, has been of great significance in this respect. The Roman period is now also viewed in subtly different ways in national museums in England, Scotland, and Wales in terms of it being part of a continuum in the creation of a national history and national identity in each of the three countries. These local, regional, national, and international strands mirror certain aspects of the situation relating to the promotion of identity in the northern frontier zone between the second and fifth centuries AD.

But there was not only emptiness on the horizon: there were opportunities too for art to develop and respond, and to finally emerge with distinct regional traits. Much of this art ending up channelling individuals' experiences of that strangest of new environments into the art we now see and ourselves experience at the sites in the north and in its museums. During our visits we have to decide how this art fits in, both as a response to its time and as something that can illuminate a path forward for us in understanding the past in the present.

This is also a study pivoting on the inter-related and not necessarily contradictory processes of remembering and forgetting. At this time we must envisage these as constantly turning and turning together in a kind of Yeatsian gyre.

Regional Character

There was not a Roman art literally portraying this northern region, in the way that, for instance, Campanian landscapes featured repeatedly in the Flavian artistic and poetic imagination and, to a lesser extent, did Thessaly. However, if Campania was a landscape of reality and mythology, a land of both gods and monsters, then so too was the landscape of northern Britain. Maybe *Romanitas* in northern Britain could be symbolised by reference to the idea of that landscape, of that region, without actually depicting it as such. The whole sensory experience of the northern landscape and its cultural signposts was reflected in the ability of the art overall to recall and represent absent things and fuse them into pictorial wholes. It demonstrated the tensions between progress and preservation implicit in all these representations taken together. At different times the art reflected a crisis of confidence, but historical events and circumstances allowed the contemplation of a return to some kind of order and, as a corollary, a return perhaps to more traditional forms of representation and ways of seeing.

There is no denying that sculpture in stone would have appeared to have mattered, that is had some social or cultural value, to only a relatively small audience in Roman Britain, in the fortresses and forts of the province principally and in the large urban centres. As the majority of sculpture from Roman Britain is in some way religious or votive there must be some particular explanation for this phenomenon. It has been argued that once the main military and urban audience for stone sculpture in Roman Britain has been discounted from the picture, then there is an undeniable correspondence, and therefore a link, between the distribution of stone sculptures remaining and geological deposits of good, or at least reasonable, stone suitable for carving. If sculpture linked to religious sites and sculpture of a religious nature made for private individuals is then discounted few dots would be left on the distribution map.

This phenomenon has been described as a ‘geography of provincialism’, an intriguing idea and one which is useful in describing the stone sculpture tradition in northern Roman Britain. Peter Stewart, who coined the term, has suggested that the outcrops of good stone in the north appropriate for fine working were few and therefore that the nature and quality of artistic output would have been limited from the outset. Stewart has also noted that ‘commentaries on provincial sculpture periodically seek to redeem them or make excuses for them’ but such approaches will be eschewed here. Romano-British art was what it was: no more, no less, and aesthetic judgements on its quality in terms of adherence to or divergence from classical ‘norms’ will not be made.

The number of marble sculptures from the Roman north is very small, as will be discussed later, but given that there are only around forty marble sculptures from the

whole of Roman Britain, the majority in London and the south-east of the province, this is hardly surprising. There is, however, one extraordinary example of an imported stone object from a site in Scotland for use in funerary commemoration which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

If the north can be seen as a repository of good stone outcrops suitable for carving and sculpting, and of course for many types of localised stone which were not ideally suited but which were used anyway simply out of convenience it would seem, it is noteworthy that no sculptures in stone sourced from the region have been found in London and the south-east of the province, as possibly might have been expected. The *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* (CSIR) volume covering this southern region was the first to include an excellent and very precise analysis of the origins of all stone types by Kevin Hayward. Indeed, the farthest north sources for any stone used in the region are Ancaster in Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire which is represented by an altar made of Millstone Grit. Whether any sculptures in northern stone found their way to the midlands remains uncertain.

When undertaking research for this book in various museums I was struck by the way in which the underlying geometry of the art was made visible by the reduction of sculptural forms to elementary shapes and combinations of shapes, and how this made the viewer more aware of subtle differences of surfaces and materials. I was quite often struck by how the undulations, grainy texture, or inclusions in the stones, and chips and nicks representing chisel marks elaborated and articulated the surfaces, to say nothing of the varying colours of the different local stones used. There would seem to have been a truth to materials represented here that reflected the northern environment. Many sculptural works from the north have a strong surface articulation that deals equally well with volume and light, reflecting the varied landscapes and weather conditions that the sculpture inhabited. The effectiveness, indeed the affect, of contrasting tone and texture marks out much of the region's Roman artworks. Later in the book I will discuss the evidence for some sculptures in the region, and more widely in Roman Britain, having been painted. This would not have negated the situation that I have just suggested, that local stones gave the region's sculpture its own unique character. Rather, even when painted, exposure of some works in the open, while other works were intended to always remain indoors sheltered from the elements, would have led to the flaking and peeling of painted surfaces and the exposure of the natural stone colour and surface below. We must imagine the effect as being akin to the natural outcropping of deposits of the northern region's stone in its own landscape in miniature.

We will need to consider the life of the artworks and their ability to alter the spaces that contained them, as well as their afterlives. The basic question will be how did we get from there to here? Some statues represented an attempt to materialise the place at the other side of bodily appearance. By treating the body as a place in this

way a trace of a real event, of a real body in time, was left. The human figure was thus firmly and unequivocally rooted in this landscape. Sculptures could be personated in a number of ways: by first-person inscriptions, through the use of a name in the inscription, and through the presentation of an image that could be accepted as a portrait or a simulacrum of a specific individual, or by any combination of these three strategies.

As with so many strains of Romano-British art sculpture in the Roman north can be viewed in some way as the creation of new vernacular forms, and their subsequent constant rehabilitation, and as the manifestation of popular visual expression. Much of this art though consisted of public images, which means that its creation and viewing was situated within a political and ideological context sufficiently robust enough in its control of cultural parameters that it could make use of what were otherwise vernacular forms to express mainstream and official messages.

The creation of the frontier works should also be considered a kind of visual exercise as well, one that significantly impacted on the viewing of the landscape. Not only were the two linear frontiers of Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall imposed on the landscape but they also blocked vistas, interrupted sight lines, and changed perceptions of how this underlying landscape could be viewed and experienced. The Roman army, of course, intended for the frontiers to dominate the landscapes into which they were set, but at the same time to be constructed in such a way that visibility, for signalling, for patrolling, and for security, was a highly-significant factor in the design and execution of the works. Both walls took advantage of the natural topography to create vantage points and clear lines of sight northwards.

But what would have the experience have been like to view the wall when approaching it from the north? In the case of Hadrian's Wall there is some evidence to suggest that rather than the pointed stone walling that we see today and which gives us the impression that the original wall was like this, but taller, the outer wall face could have been plastered or rendered and painted white, or just simply have been whitewashed, as Jim Crow has suggested. Certain stretches only might have been painted or this might have occurred just during certain of the wall periods as they are known: there is not enough evidence to be sure of the significance of findings of scored plaster imitating ashlar joints at Denton and evidence for rendering on the wall face at Heddron, both on the wall. Equally, a chamfered block retaining colour from whitewashing from Peel Gap is intriguing, but not in any way conclusive. Were Hadrian's Wall to have been painted white on its outer face it would have been visible for miles from the north looking south, particularly in the spring and summer; in winter snows this might have made the wall less visible from a distance. Colour would in these circumstances have further emphasised the power and might of Rome and its ability to impose itself on a foreign natural landscape in such an unnatural way.

While this study will continually refer to northern Britain as a heavily-militarised zone, it must be made clear from the outset that this did not mean that it was an exclusively military zone, even on the frontiers. Civilian settlements or *vici* would have existed outside the vast majority of Roman forts across the empire, housing the wives and families of soldiers, not legally recognised till the Severan edict of AD 197, veterans, craftsmen, traders, and others. Archaeological evidence from within some forts suggests sometimes the presence of non-military people there, completely blurring the boundaries between military and civilian. Further away from the forts agricultural settlements would have been in existence.

Responses and Practices

There is, of course, a chronological aspect to this study but not one that dictates its structure. Rather I have chosen to organise the study on a thematic basis, stressing the force of the drive towards the expression of identity in the creation of the art of the region.

There can be no doubt that the surveyors of the Roman army were extraordinarily adept and rapid at locating sources of good quality building stone, if available, in every part of Britain that they traversed, many of these stones also being suitable for carving and sculpting. While there is not a particularly large number of sculptures from the north confidently dated to the first century AD it is noticeable that there was a significant and quite dramatic increase in the number of sculptures dating to the second and earlier third centuries and in the number of sites at which sculptures appeared at that time. In the later third and fourth centuries numbers of sculptures decreased and we must look for explanations for this phenomenon in terms of how art was used in the later Roman period in the region, and crucially much more widely, in ways which differed from the earlier circumstances and contexts.

The database of the Last Statues of Antiquity Project (LSA), an impressive empire-wide investigation of Roman honorific public statues dating to AD 284-650, contains a total of 2800 individual entries, but only five catalogue entries (c. 0.18%) relating to Roman Britain and, I think quite significantly, three of these are statues set up in the Roman north, where ‘the statue habit’ had been a marked trend in the region’s art in the preceding two centuries. These three northern statues of late antiquity are the marble head of the emperor Constantine from York, discussed in Chapter Two, a statue of Mars also from York and dating to the late third to early fourth century AD (Figure 2) discussed in Chapter Three, and a fourth century statue base probably from the Roman fort at Binchester in County Durham, subsequently reused and built into the fabric of the nearby Anglo-Saxon church at Escomb, just across the Wear Valley from Binchester. The Binchester/Escomb statue base is inscribed with the words ‘*bono rei publicae nato*’, that is ‘to one who was born for the good of the state’, a formula of words which might be thought to have been used with regard to Constantine and



Figure 2 Statue of Mars from York. Late third to early fourth century AD. Yorkshire, Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk>).

his dynasty. The same formula appears on another northern statue base from Old Penrith in Cumbria, but that particular stone must have been discounted from the LSA database for some reason.

Recent research by Maryl Gensheimer has suggested that the specifics of the decorative programme of the monumental Baths of Caracalla in Rome were to a great extent dictated by the ideological preferences of the Severan dynasty and its nostalgia for the Antonine emperors, expressed by tell-tale decorative elements, themes, tropes, and statuary subjects that acted as a kind of shorthand to help the viewer understand the dynastic programme. I will argue that to some extent the profile of the second into third century AD assemblage of sculptures from northern Britain also partly reflected these aims.

The researchers from the Last Statues of Antiquity project were obviously not concerned with other types of decorated stonework or with dedicatory inscriptions, unless they related to now-lost statues. Certainly stonemasons were producing these other types of work after AD 284 but just not in the quantity that they previously had done. In Chapter Four I will consider inscribed gravestones or stelae and inscribed sarcophagi which might have been Christian, and some of which must date to after this time. Other post-AD 284 material from the Roman north includes two inscriptions from Hadrian's Wall, from the forts at Birdoswald and Chesters. The Birdoswald stone is a dedication slab and building record commemorating the rebuilding of the commandant's house, headquarters building, and bath house at the fort, and in its mentioning Diocletian and Maximian as Augusti and Constantius and Maximianus as Caesars can be confidently dated to AD 297-305. The Chesters inscription is a dedication to Jupiter Dolichenus that can be very precisely dated by its formula to AD 286. But by far and away the latest Roman military inscription from the north comes from the east coast fortlet at Ravenscar, North Yorkshire. This inscription records that

Justinianus and Vindicianus ‘built this tower and fort from ground level’ which must date the stone to after AD 369 when Count Theodosius set in train the creation of the system of defensive fortlets along this stretch of the east coast.

In addition, a few of a noteworthy series of over a dozen third or early fourth century AD inscribed milestones from Hadrian’s Wall and its hinterland post-date, or could post-date, AD 284. These almost seem to have been advertising hoardings supporting certain emperors in a time of great political instability and should be thought of as not only functional objects but also highly ideological ones. These include the milestone from Gallows Hill, south of Carlisle in Cumbria, whose original dedication had been erased, with a new dedication to Carausius (AD 286–293) being added above: subsequently the stone was dug up, reversed, put back in position with the name of Carausius now out of sight on the buried portion, and a third dedication to Constantine as Caesar (AD 306–307) was now cut. Other milestone inscriptions mention Diocletian (AD 284–305: Old Wall, Cumbria), Maximian (AD 286–305), and their immediate successors, Galerius as Caesar (AD 305–311: from off Dere Street in County Durham), Maximinus as Caesar (AD 309–313: from Corbridge), Constantius I as Caesar/Constantinus I as Caesar/Maximianus/and Maximinus (respectively AD 296–305/306–307/305–311/and 309–313: from near Vindolanda), and Constantine I (AD 307–337: from Hesket, Cumbria, Carvoran on Hadrian’s Wall, and two from near Vindolanda).

It might be thought that the production of art and the scale of that production would at any time have mirrored trends in material culture and cultural practice in general in Roman Britain. In the Roman north it is therefore interesting to note that changes among certain classes of artefact can be detected in the second half of the fourth century AD, and most particularly in the last quarter of that century.

Underpinning any study of Roman or Romanised art is the idea of tracing stylistically-consistent signatures within this group, even before the semiotics of the works is considered. So in terms of analysis we can draw upon ideas of similarity or difference, look for physical connections, and examine conventions of representation. Romano-British art’s richness could be said to have lain in its often hybrid combination of these. We need to look at broader culture beyond appearances. At first sight it might be thought that art in the Roman north was just a series of discontinuous sequences, but through these we can trace the legacy of various ideological positions and expressions of identity. We need to be aware of the different roles played by text and images at this time in this specific region and the way that social practices and meanings were constructed through competing interpretations. Changes over time reconfigure or emphasise particular readings.

While the question of whether certain artworks from Roman Britain constituted examples of ‘good art’ or ‘bad art’ will not be asked or answered in this book it needs to at least be considered in terms of whether divergence from classical norms could



Figure 3 Tombstone of a Romano-British woman holding a fan from Carlisle. Second century AD. Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. (Photo: Copyright Tullie House Museum, Carlisle).

have represented a deliberate act of resistance or subversion, as has been suggested in some cases from Roman Britain. Indeed, in some contexts in the north it is the works in a classical style which might be thought to have been out of place. Of course, not every image had rigour and weight, and some had just power rather than subtlety or accomplishment. Misfires or experiments are never altogether without interest in any case. The contrast in style between the image on the late third or early fourth century AD tombstone of Vellibia Ertola from Corbridge (Figure 4) and the image on the second century AD tombstone of a woman holding a fan from Carlisle (Figure 3) could not be greater. But both were in the end successful works of communication.

The idea of a canon of a very small number of good Romano-British artworks and the rest existing at the margins can be rejected. The responsive eye would have seen something dense, novel, taut, charged, multivalent, or ambiguous in most of the art discussed here. The deeply-negative views of Robin Collingwood on Romano-British sculpture in general, though curiously exempting a few select works including the so-called Corbridge Lion, now appear decades later to be a little ridiculous, though some of these same prejudices centred around ideas of style and competence still unfortunately linger in a few even quite recent academic studies. Yet in the



Figure 4 Tombstone of Vellibia Ertola from Corbridge, Northumberland. Later third century AD. Corbridge Site Museum. (Photo: Slide archive of the former School of Continuing Studies, Birmingham University).

contemporary environment some of these artworks must have arrived like postcards from the future, and many still seem especially potent now. The stance adopted here is that the art of Roman Britain ‘is what it is’ and that value judgements on it should not generally be made. The consolation of this approach is the knowledge that the dynamic ambivalence of many works surveyed had a dreadful vitality that must have reflected a dedication to universalising particular messages. However, nevertheless the book will explore how a tension between the poles of marginality and canonicity informs the central discourse on Romano-British art and its practitioners and consumers. These two extremes are more a reflection of ingrained art historical practices rather than a reality: perhaps there has been too much emphasis on surface rather than on close reading.

My definition of art in this book has been broad. As an archaeologist rather than an art historian I view art as being part of a broader material culture and not as something that existed or exists in a vacuum, relatable only to other art. It is the cultural life of images that it is most important to always consider. The key to understanding and interpreting art is to consider its context, if possible, and its viewers. In Roman Britain the social and cultural significance of this new market in art was that by putting a price on things that previously had none mere goods were transformed into commodities with a specific exchange value. There was obviously a great deal of difference in the meaning and significance of images viewed in a private house, in the social environment of the Roman baths, in a town forum, or in a funerary context.

Roman art need not be defined as simply figural sculpture, along with mosaics and wall paintings. It also included engraved gemstones, decorated silver and bronze vessels, decorated and figured pottery and glass vessels, other types of decorated metalwork including military equipment, carved jet items, and decorated bone items. In Roman times non-figural decoration in itself could constitute an image and be a signifier of sorts, as indeed were certain styles and forms. Sometimes under the category of art also can be included inscriptions or maker’s marks on pottery vessels and other

items, where the words inscribed or stamped were as much to be *seen* as to be *read*. Caricature *graffiti* can also be considered to have been art, to be part of the overall visual field. As already noted, questions of artistic competence or stylistic adherence will be largely absent from the book, unless they are strictly relevant. A degree of accuracy would appear to have been but one element, and often a minor one at that, in the construction of an image in Romano-British art. Our present-day perception of these artworks, that is the turning of something we see into something that we actually know, cannot possibly be the same as contemporary perceptions, but by recognising this, and by the liberal use of the words ‘possibly’, ‘probably’, and ‘might have’ to temper our interpretations, we can at least attempt to unpick the dynamic inter-relationships of vision and perception which would have hung around many of these artworks like an early morning mist.

The art from northern Roman Britain will above all be read as an expression of identity on both a macro-level, that is regionally, right down to a micro-level, that of the private individual. Of course, individuals can have, and often did have, more than one identity, indeed sometimes multiple identities. The porousness, permeability, and mixture of identities was reflected in the art, most commonly in funerary art, as will be discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Seven. The different types of identity could include: individual or personal identity; group identity; tribal or ethnic identity, or identity based on origins; gender identity; status identity; religious identity; and occupational identity. Identities could coexist, overlap, be replaced, ebb and flow and so on, often in powerful and significant ways as we shall see. The contrast and contradictions inherent in the creation and maintenance of identities was apparently dynamic. Inscriptions could be read as if spoken by funerary stelae and funerary images viewed, somehow bringing the deceased persons into the here and now in a way which questioned standard concepts of linear time.

In Praise of Sandstone

As noted in the Preface there has been no previous book-length study of the art of northern Roman Britain, though most of the sculpture from the region has been catalogued in the *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani* (CSIR) project volumes for Roman Britain, with the final volume in press, its few mosaic pavements have been discussed in the first volume of the impressive *Roman Mosaics of Britain* series, and its few recorded wall paintings have also been catalogued in a published monograph study.

Not a single one of the artworks from the region carries an artist’s name or signature, and no production workshops of artists have been excavated. Hypotheses about the location of sculptors’ workshops in Carlisle making distinctive and stylistically-similar grave stelae depicting women and children make sense, but this remains unproven, as does the existence of a northern school or group of mosaicists producing pavements out of a postulated workshop in Aldborough.

One factor which makes the art of the region so distinct when viewed alongside the rest of Roman Britain is the sheer number of sculptural works from the north. Using data from the *CSIR* project, enhanced with reporting of new finds of sculpture in the annual journal *Britannia*, it can be seen that around 1750 items of sculpted stone come from the Roman north, as opposed to around 1005 items in total from the rest of Roman Britain. This means that 63.5% of all sculptural items in the whole province come from the Roman north, indicating that visual culture in terms of its expression and consumption through the medium of statuary and sculpture seems to have been of particular significance in the region, presumably because of the heavy military presence here and the role that art played in the ideological programme and workings of the Roman army.

Using the *CSIR* categories of types of sculpture this breaks down into: Graeco-Roman Deities; Oriental Deities; Romano-Celtic Deities; Altars; Imperial Iconography; Funerary Monuments; Building Records; Anthropomorphic Figures; Miscellaneous Sculptures; and Miscellaneous Animals. The largest category of statuary by far in the northern assemblage is images of deities, which includes decorated inscribed altars with deities' names, with around 580 individual items, representing almost exactly one third of the overall sculptural assemblage. Under this category Graeco-Roman deities dominate, at around 67% of the total number of deities, followed by Romano-Celtic deities at around 21% of the total, and Oriental deities at around 12%. Further discussion about the relative popularity of individual deities in the northern region will be offered in Chapter Three. The second largest category of sculptural type is funerary monuments, mainly tombstones, at around 21% of the overall northern assemblage. It is extremely interesting, and highly significant, to note that of decorated funerary monuments from Roman Britain as a whole just over 80% of the province's decorated funerary monuments come from the northern zone. Again, this must say something very specific about the way that death was both conceptualised and commemorated in the region, and the role that art played in the ideological underpinnings of contemporary funerary practices. Again, I will return to this point in a later chapter.

Such a huge dataset of sculptures from the region allows us to perhaps approach the material in a different way to an analysis of the much smaller southern Romano-British assemblage, to probe the potential multiplicity of meanings of individual statues or of certain statue types, and to think about the ways in which sculptural decoration might have engaged the viewers, and revealed intended messages which underlay the experience of different regional contexts.

Distribution patterns of almost any commodity tend to reflect patterns of supply and demand, and art in Roman Britain is no exception. Find-spots of sculptures in the towns and military bases of the province reflect a pattern in how sculpture was conceptualised, consumed, and used. The clustering of significant quantities of sculpture in northern Roman Britain reflected the concentrated deployment of

military forces in this region. In addition to this, there is the determinism of geology: that is, that sculptural traditions took hold in areas where accessible and good quality stone was available. Certainly in northern Roman Britain there is no evidence to suggest that sculptural stone from other regions or finished works in non-local stone were traded.

This very much supports my argument that the art *from* northern Roman Britain was an art *of* northern Roman Britain, quite literally in terms of stones employed in the production of sculpture here. Interesting though it is, I am not sure that I altogether agree with the suggestion that the material presence of some sculptures from Roman Britain, particularly funerary monuments, in terms of their permanence and overt physicality was more significant than what was actually carved on them in terms of inscriptions and images.

Large-scale bronze statues must have been common throughout Roman Britain, and therefore in the northern region as well, but evidence for these is limited by the fact that metal from redundant statues could be easily recycled and probably would have been. When fragments of bronze statues are recovered it is important to consider why and how such fragments escaped the bronze-smiths' melting-pot. The afterlife of such sculpture is sometimes of great interest in itself. Sometimes heads from statues seem to have been deposited deliberately in so-called 'watery places' and there must have been some ideological or religious motive for such actions.

Very few bronze statue fragments have been found in the north. Indeed, of around 60 finds of fragments of bronze and in one case silver statues from Roman Britain as a whole only nine come from north of Lincoln (figures from a study by Ben Croxford enhanced by subsequent PAS (Portable Antiquities Scheme)-registered finds). In the CSIR volumes are listed: the leg and a basal fragment of a full-size equestrian statue found in a remote location at Milsington, Roxburghshire in Scotland (Figure 5); a bronze finger is reported as having been found at Arthur's O'on, also in Scotland; a small fragment of a male torso from Carrawburgh; a full-size bronze finger, bent at a joint and wearing a ring from Carvoran; and part of a silver statue of Victory was found at a quarry site at Tunshill, Butterworth, Lancashire in the late eighteenth century and is now in the British Museum in London. The Tunshill Victory (Figure 6) is a fascinating object, less than half-size and dating to the second to fourth century AD, consisting of an arm and an inscribed plaque that would have been attached to the wrist. The inscription records that it was dedicated 'to Victory, to the victorious Sixth Legion' by Valerius Rufus, suggesting that the statue was originally set up in the headquarters building in the legionary fortress at York. How this statue fragment later ended up some sixty miles away must remain a mystery.

In the late 1980s a finger from a bronze statue was excavated from just outside the fort at South Shields. The PAS database holds records of a full-size right ear and part of the



Figure 5 Leg from a life-size bronze equestrian statue from Milsington, Roxburghshire, Scotland. Undated. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).

side of a head from a life-size statue, possibly dating to the second or third century AD, found quite recently at Brompton on Swale in North Yorkshire and, from the same county, fragments of an eye, the hair, and neck of a bronze statue from Terrington. A bronze hand from Carrawburgh is probably a religious item, like the bronze hand of Jupiter Dolichenus recently excavated at Vindolanda.

As noted, there must have been a considerable number of bronze statues in the region, but by reason of the reuse of scrap metal throughout the Roman period and beyond we have little evidence to produce even basic numbers and to discuss contexts. Ben Croxford has noted that though according to present figures metal statues represent just 13% of the total number of recorded statues from Roman Britain, the other 87% being of stone, we can only guess at what the actual percentage might really have been, particularly as we do not know what cultural value might or might not have been placed on such artworks in Romano-British society.

Quantifying Character

Compared to central, southern, and particularly south-western Roman Britain the northern region is very noticeably an area in which buildings such as villas and town-houses decorated with mosaic pavements and painted wall and ceiling plaster were relatively rare. Therefore it is not possible to talk about questions of integrated



Figure 6 Silver arm and plaque from a small statue of Victory from Tunshill, Lancashire. Second to fourth century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

decorative schemes in all media in private residences, as one often can in the southern parts of the province. However, some notable examples of these art-forms are present in the archaeological record in the north and the quantification of such artworks can add to the definition of the distinct artistic character of the region.

In the first volume of *The Roman Mosaics of Britain* series David Neal and Steve Cosh catalogued 62 mosaics from sixteen sites in the northern region as defined in this present study, and one has been discovered subsequently, giving a total of 63 mosaics from 17 sites. These comprise eleven pavements from the main regional urban centre and legionary fortress of York, twenty three from the *civitas* capital of Aldborough, one each from the small towns at Malton and Catterick, four each from the villas at Well and Kirk Sink, Gargrave, both in North Yorkshire, three from the Holme House villa at Piercebridge in County Durham, the most northerly mosaics from Roman Britain, and three from the West Yorkshire villa of Dalton Parlours at Collingham, two each from Beadlam villa, Oulston villa, Castle Dykes villa, and Langton villa, all again in North Yorkshire, and one each from the villas at Hovingham, Kirkby Wharfe, Musley Bank, Roughborough, and Aiskew, all in North Yorkshire. As the *Roman Mosaics of Britain* project eventually published four substantial volumes on the pavements of the province, totally around 2000 catalogue entries, it can be seen that the number of mosaics from the north of Britain is infinitesimal compared to the rest of the province, just c.3.15% of the national total.

Two stray *tesserae* have been found at the Brooklyn House, Norton site, North Yorkshire, and though there are reports of *tesserae* having been found at the Scottish sites of Birrens, Castlecary, and Inchtuthil no mosaic pavements have been found *in situ* in Scotland.

The most significant site in the north for mosaics is the town of Aldborough, from which comes one of the most interesting and curious mosaics, a small pavement centre-panel or *emblema* carrying an image of the infant baby brothers Romulus and Remus being fed by the She-Wolf under the canopy of a tree (Figure 7). This image then is highly significant in terms of its ideological connections to ideas about Rome's deep mytho-historical origins, even though quite unrealistically rendered.

Later, Remus was to die, killed either by Romulus or by one of his underlings, and Romulus became sole founder and ruler of the new city of Rome, named after him. That the foundation myth involving Romulus still remained potent down the years is well illustrated by the accounts detailing the repair and renovation of the '*casa Romuli*', that is Romulus's original hut or a facsimile of it, on the Palatine Hill on a number of occasions following its damage by fire towards the end of the first century BC. Remarkably, it is also possible that this heritage structure was still extant in some form during the reign of Constantine in the fourth century AD.

Like all such myths the basic story of Romulus and Remus apparently became embellished with extra detail down the years. For instance, in his book the *Aeneid* the Augustan Roman poet Virgil made King Numitor of Alba Longa a descendant of Aeneas, the Trojan prince who had fled from burning Troy. In this way he gave succour to the emperor Augustus's own attempts to link himself with the Trojan hero in his political and artistic propaganda.

Anyone viewing the Aldborough Wolf and Twins mosaic today will immediately realise that it has been very heavily restored, some think fancifully over-restored, in the Victorian period before its acquisition by Leeds City Museum. Indeed, David Neal and Steve Cosh believe that the mosaic is a fake, a view not shared by all academics or by Leeds Museum which still displays the piece along with an interpretive caption that does not question its authenticity.

Although the Aldborough pavement probably dates to the late third or even early fourth century AD it is possible that the house's owner and commissioner of the mosaic was somehow connected to the imperial cult or to the Roman administration. In any case, they are likely to have been familiar with Latin literature and Roman mythology.

Another mosaic from Aldborough, known as the Muses Mosaic, again suggests a Roman or Romanised house owner who wished to demonstrate and indulge their classical learning. Heavily-damaged, and surviving only in part, there can be made out on the mosaic a figure holding a scroll, probably Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, or Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy, with an accompanying Greek inscription that names Mount Helicon and thus helps identify the woman as one of the nine Muses who lived there. This is one of only a very small number of inscribed mosaics from Roman



Figure 7 Mosaic panel depicting the She-Wolf with the twins Romulus and Remus from Aldborough, North Yorkshire. Late third or fourth century AD. Leeds City Museum. (Photo: Author).

Britain as a whole. A nature versus culture opposition could sometimes be created by the appearance of male and female images together, and yet culture itself was best exemplified in Roman art by the depiction of one or all of the nine female Muses, born to the Titaness Mnemosyne and fathered by Zeus, an ideological strategy probably employed here at Aldborough. Another mosaic from the town bore an *emblema* of a lion lying under a tree, while a number of other geometric patterned mosaics have also been discovered here.

A larger number of mosaics are recorded from York, the most interesting and significant of which comes from a Roman house at Tanners Row which had at least four floor mosaics, including the York Four Seasons mosaic of the later third century AD which is now on display in the Yorkshire Museum in the city. On it can be seen a bust of a figure representing Spring with a bird, Summer with a bunch of grapes, though this is considered to probably be an imaginative restoration, Autumn with a rake, and Winter with a dead branch. The Gorgon Medusa is pictured at the centre of the mosaic, badly damaged and just now represented by her snake hair

The Yorkshire Museum also houses fragmentary mosaics from a number of villa sites in the countryside beyond *Eboracum*: a fragment again with Medusa on it from Dalton Parlours villa, Collingham, Leeds, West Yorkshire; a fragment of a female head from

Oulston villa, Hambleton, North Yorkshire, from where also comes a mosaic of an urn and trees; and part of a mosaic from Well, Hambleton Roman villa.

The size of the northern mosaic assemblage is far too small from which to make meaningful generalisations, but a few observations can certainly be offered. There is a predominance of geometric patterns on these pavements which might tell us something about perhaps more modest aesthetic tastes in the north in comparison with south-western Britain for instance. Having said that, the very fact that there are more than thirteen modest villa sites with mosaics so far identified in the region suggests an interesting level of take-up of Romanised architecture and its attendant adornments particularly in the southern countryside of the northern zone. Seasons mosaics were popular throughout Roman Britain and the two such pavements from town houses in York and Malton probably simply reflected a more generalised Romano-British taste, as indeed did the Medusa mosaic from the villa at Dalton Parlours and the Medusa on the York Seasons pavement. Aquatic motifs, like the sea-cow on the Toft Green York mosaic, were common in bath houses throughout Roman Britain. The two most exceptional northern pavements both come from houses in Aldborough, the Muses Mosaic and the She-Wolf Mosaic. The choice of design of both suggests a learned client with knowledge of Latin literature and Greco-Roman mythology, while the inscription on the Muses pavement probably also confirms that the client had some knowledge of Greek or, at worst, pretended to and found a mosaicist who did. On the other hand, the difference in competence in the drawing of the design for these two pavements, if the allegedly heavy-handed Victorian restoration of the She-Wolf Mosaic has not in fact rendered a good quality mosaic into a poorly-made one, suggests different workshops and client expectations. While at one time it was thought that the mosaic pavements of Aldborough, Dalton Parlours, and Malton shared enough stylistic similarities as to constitute a coherent Northern Group of mosaics, and to have been the product of a single workshop, this theory is not quite so widely accepted now.

Two Gorgon mosaics being recorded from the north is highly interesting and perhaps significant. In the Greco-Roman world certain types of images of mythological women could be seen to be images of apprehension by men in particular. Fear of untamed women such as Amazons, Maenads, and Medusa and the Gorgons, for instance, placed the use and deployment of such images often in a didactic context aimed at female viewers. It was as if the appeal of such rogue and feral women could have negatively influenced ordinary Roman women and subverted individual male power and society's institutions in the process.

Most common though of these ravening monsters were the three Gorgons. Medusa and her two Gorgon sisters with their destructive gaze represented an inversion of the power of the male gaze. Their fangs, snake hair, and ability to turn mortals to stone with their glare made them anathema to many men, an untamed demonic female sexual energy. Medusa in Roman art was generally shown just as a severed head-a

gorgoneion-particularly in military contexts throughout the empire where her ferocity might have been often admired and in funerary contexts as well, where, like the sphinx, she served a protective purpose. Images of Medusa were very popular on Roman mosaic pavements throughout the empire, serving perhaps as talismanic, apotropaic protectors of the household, their ubiquity in this context being well illustrated by the fact that they occur quite widely in the western provinces on mosaics, with at least five examples being known from Roman Britain alone, two of those being our northern examples.

Decorated painted wall plaster has been recovered by excavation of a number of buildings in both York and Catterick, from Chester and Malton, from Dalton Parlours villa, the latter including ceiling plaster, from Piercebridge, and from Binchester fort. The Catterick plaster includes material from a probable *mansio* that would appear to have undergone fairly regular replastering and redecoration over the time of its use, as indicated by three successive layers of plaster, one on top of another. In the first phase the room bore decoration in the form of a tree or shrub with leaves, in the second phase another tree appears, along with floral swags and a *cantharus* containing foliage, the third phase being simply open panels and below a register of painted marbling panels. Another section of plaster from a shop premises in Catterick again was painted with panels intended to resemble marble.

The York plaster comes from one of the northern rooms in the fourth century AD *principia* of the fortress there, now incorporated in the undercroft of York Minster. Though fragmentary when found, the decorative scheme was partially reconstructable following the lifting of the plaster and its conservation. It consists of a lower register of rectangular panels painted to resemble marble and an upper register with panels, theatrical masks, and foliage. In the taller, central register are architectural elements including columns, arches and coved ceilings, doves or other birds, and, most intriguingly, a human figure, a man dressed in a long garment standing facing out directly towards the viewer and holding something in his hand.

From the commandant's bath house at Binchester Roman fort in County Durham comes a small fragment of painted plaster on which can be seen a man's leg, possibly the leg of an athlete, an altogether appropriate figure to be found in such a setting.

In summary then, the art of northern Roman Britain was distinctive from other areas of the province because of the sheer number of sculptural works commissioned and produced here, because of the balance of subject matter of these sculptures, because of the contexts in which this art was placed or used, because of the use of local stone for sculpture and the exploitation and use of regional materials such as jet and shale, because of a smaller market for the work of mosaicists and wall painters here, and because of the ways in which both the art of sculpture and the minor arts of gem cutting, glass, pottery, and metal vessel production represented and reflected the

identities of the people of the region. Viewed in comparison to the rest of the province, this art can be argued to have defined the region's cultural character through the power of images and of visual culture here. In the next three chapters the issue of identity will be further pursued by an examination of the appearance of images of the Roman imperial families in the region and of the manifestation of religious identities here through the creation and use of images of the gods. Religious identity became a focus for artistic expression and innovation, and allowed belief and emotion to be reflected in the art of the northern region.

Chapter Two

Shadowplayers

All the peoples of the Roman empire were encouraged to identify with the ideological programme of the state through the person of the emperor and sometimes other members of the imperial family. Always present in their lives, but usually physically absent, the emperor was both a figure of political authority and sometimes also the focus of religious observance through the various imperial cults. In Roman Britain the emperor was particularly venerated by the army in a formal manner that had no equivalent calendar of rites among the civilian population. Only a very small number of legitimate Roman emperors ever set foot in Britain: among these were Vespasian, while serving in the Roman army of invasion, Claudius, Hadrian, Pertinax, as governor before he became emperor, Septimius Severus, Geta, Caracalla, Constantius I, Constantine, and Constans. Coincidentally, both Septimius Severus and, ninety five years later, Constantius I died at York while on campaign in the north.

Hadrian's visit to Britain in or around AD 122 was part of his programmatic series of travels around the provinces of the empire, commemorated in Britain, as in other provinces, with celebratory coin issues and inscriptions recording the dedication of building projects, in Britain this including the forum in Wroxeter. In northern Britain however a more significant outcome of his visit was the planning of the building of permanent frontier defences here, in the form of Hadrian's Wall, usually accepted as having been completed in or around AD 128. It was pointed out some years ago by Jim Crow that some parts of the wall, and possibly indeed all of the wall, were painted white. Thus the wall was both a physical disruption of the landscape, as well as a highly-visible one, that meant that Hadrian was the Roman emperor who left the most permanent mark on the landscape of northern Britain.

Images of Authority

If emperors could not be present in person they could be present in terms of their images circulating among the population of far-flung provinces in the form of their portraits on the obverse of coins, and statuary likenesses created for public spaces and places, for military and administrative centres, and for buildings associated with the imperial cults. The presented identity of an emperor would seem sometimes to have been mediated as much by viewers of images and readers of texts as by official sources.

The relationship between the army and the emperor was crucial: the type of authority on which such a privileged relationship was grounded was a mixture of charismatic authority and financial and political patronage. There was to some extent a separation between the reality and representation of imperial power, or rather the repertoires

of representation. Changes in the performative nature of Roman power in the provinces and in its frontier zones might have led to the shifting of the centrality of representation away from the figure of the emperor towards the transcribing and inscribing of his name. To track this overlap between text and image we need to be constantly aware of how one medium might have interacted with another.

It is surely not entirely coincidental that those emperors whose sculptural or statuette images have been found at various sites in Roman Britain themselves either visited or served in Britain, in the cases of Claudius, Hadrian, Pertinax, and Constantine, or were linked to a major or significant event in the province, as in the case of Nero and the Boudiccan uprising, and Commodus in appointing Pertinax as governor of the province.

Even though the Roman historian Suetonius tells us that statues and images of the emperor Titus (reigned AD 79-81) could be found widely in Britain and Germany, only a handful of imperial images have so far been recovered from Roman Britain as a whole. There must have been many more, particularly at military bases, though an inscribed statue base from Aldborough shows that imperial statues would also have been set up in the towns and administrative centres of the province. The Aldborough inscription is to ‘the deified Antoninus the Great..’, in this case either Antoninus Pius or, more likely, Caracalla.

In northern Roman Britain only a relatively small number of statuary imperial images or possible imperial images are known. In chronological order these are: a marble head thought by some academics to be of Trajan (reigned AD 98-117) from Hawkshaw, Peeblesshire in Scotland; a bronze figure of Commodus (reigned AD 177-192), probably from Birdoswald in Cumbria; possibly a head of a third century emperor, otherwise unidentifiable, from Chester-le-Street, County Durham which will not be discussed further here; and a twice life-size portrait head of Constantine (reigned AD 306-337) from York.

It has been suggested that the larger than life-size marble head of a middle-aged man from a Trajanic era statue from Hawkshaw (Figure 8), now in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh, is actually a portrait statue of the emperor Trajan himself. Indeed, that not only is the image of Trajan but that it was originally an image of the earlier emperor Domitian (reigned AD 81-96) made as part of a statue to adorn a major victory monument somewhere in northern Britain that was subsequently recarved into the image of Trajan, later decapitated from the statuary body, and then looted and taken further north. Certain aspects of this interpretation are initially persuasive indeed and well argued, and marble statuary is very rare in Roman Britain and even rarer in northern Britain, but the chain of hypotheses appears unnecessarily circuitous and circumstantial, and it seems much more credible that the portrait is

VISIONS OF THE ROMAN NORTH



Figure 8 Marble portrait head of man from Hawkshaw, Peeblesshire, Scotland. Trajanic. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).



Figure 9 Silver gilt statuette of Commodus as Hercules from near Birdoswald, Cumbria. AD 191 or 192. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

of a high-ranking administrative official or army officer of the time rather than the emperor.

The gilded bronze statuette of Commodus (Figure 9) stands about 17.5 inches in height (c.44 centimetres). Its exact provenance is unknown, but its reported nineteenth century find-spot would appear to be near Birdoswald fort, towards the western end of Hadrian's Wall. It is now in the British Museum in London. The emperor appears as the young, unbearded hero god Hercules, with whom it is attested he identified strongly. Though the club that he would have held in his raised right hand is now missing from the piece, given that the figure's head is draped with a lion's head and skin, knotted on his chest, there can no doubt as to this identification. The figure wears a tunic similar to that worn by some gladiators. Commodus became obsessed with gladiators and the games, and indeed he is recorded as having himself fought in the arena. The emperor is being linked here to two of the most manly and masculine contemporary figures, Hercules and the gladiator. The whiff of testosterone given off by the artwork is almost tangible. This small work is in its own way as powerful as the most famous image of the emperor, the bust of Commodus as Hercules in the *Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori* in Rome. Certainly Commodus's *damnatio memoriae* soon after his death in AD 192 would have meant that images of the emperor were required to be removed from display, disposed of, destroyed, or defaced, and it is likely that the Birdoswald statuette was buried out of sight for this reason. In a later chapter I will consider images of masculinity and hyper-masculinity, usually found in a Roman military context. Both the emperors and the army used images of manliness as an overt vehicle for representing their own legitimacy, their authority, and their power.

The York head of Constantine (Figure 10) is of great significance, as there are maybe only a dozen sculptural portraits of Constantine recognised today from across the whole Roman empire, a number of them being idealised in the same manner as on some of his coin issues and medallions. The most famous and impressive portrait sculpture of the emperor is the colossal stone statue of Constantine that would have been placed in the remodelled *Basilica Nova* in Rome. Others include a huge bronze head of the emperor and other fragments from the same statue in the collections of the *Musei Capitolini* in Rome, a full-length stone statue of a cuirass-wearing Constantine that now stands on the balustrade around the *Campidoglio* in Rome, a stone portrait head in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, another stone portrait head in the *Musée du Bardo*, Tunis, and a bronze head from Naissus, Constantine's birthplace in Serbia, and now in the National Museum, Belgrade. A further small alabaster head of Constantine is in the collections of the British Museum in London.

The York head is often omitted from general discussions of Constantine's portraits, perhaps because of its discovery in such a remote outpost of empire as northern *Britannia*, with a hint and taint of provincialising style attached to it, and yet it is probably the earliest portrait head of the emperor that has come down to us. This

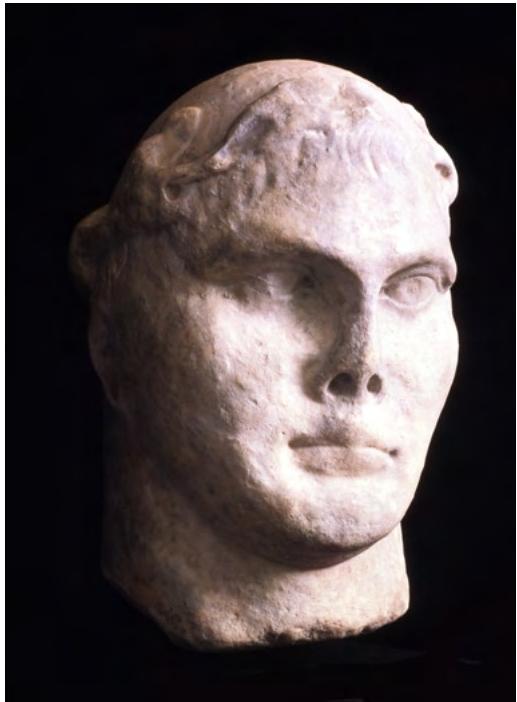


Figure 10 Twice life-size marble portrait head of Constantine the Great from York. c. AD 306. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).

twice life-size head that would have been part of a larger, colossal statue, not necessarily all of stone, is today quite seriously damaged by water erosion, but is otherwise intact. It was found in the nineteenth century on Stonegate, close to the site of the *principia* or headquarters building within the Roman legionary fortress, and it is likely that the statue of the emperor from which this head derived was set up there in commemoration of Constantine's declaration as emperor at York, perhaps inside or outside that very building, in AD 306, perhaps in that very

year or shortly thereafter. The stone used for the portrait was for many years thought to be a local Magnesian limestone, necessity and economics probably having dictated the use of a local stone in lieu of imported marble it was argued. However, the stone has now been reidentified as a crystalline marble, possibly of Italian origin, throwing a whole new light on the interpretation of the head. The portrait is of a clean-shaven man with a noticeably thick neck and plump chin, well-defined cheekbones, smooth features, small ears and large but not pronounced eyes. His nose is unfortunately damaged. His hair is cut short but comes partially over the ears and is combed over the forehead in a fringe reminiscent of the hairstyle of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. He wears what appears to be an oakleaf crown or *corona civica*. Thus we appear to have here a portrait which crosses the standardised image of the bull-necked military emperor, so common in the third century AD and occasionally borrowed as a style in Tetrarchic portraiture, and the classicising image of Augustus. Even by the time of his *quinquennalia* or five years reign the coin portraits of Constantine had not entirely moved on from referencing Tetrarchic types, as well as that of Augustus.

York was entirely a fitting place for such a statue to be set up, given that this is where he was proclaimed emperor by his troops while on campaign in Britain, an event the emperor chose later to commemorate as highly significant in the narrative of his life. It is evident from a contemporary panegyric that emperor Constantius I, Constantine's father, undertook a military campaign beyond the northern frontier of Britain against the Pictish tribes of Scotland and that he returned south to York to

regroup and resupply his forces. However, he was to die there in a matter of months. On his father's death in July AD 306 Constantine was declared emperor by the troops at York but such an acclamation gave no official authority to this popular promotion. The more formal official process first led to him being made Caesar by Galerius and then Augustus by Maximian in AD 307. However, the empire was to be riven by many more years of shifting alliances and political machinations among the Tetrarchs, leading to open civil war before Constantine could seize full power.

Constantine, perhaps because of his desire to be recognised as a soldier emperor in the vein of Trajan, always viewed his accession as 25th July AD 306, the day he was proclaimed emperor by his troops at York, and not as the formal awarding to him of the title Augustus on his wedding to Fausta in or around September AD 307. Thus, he chose to celebrate his *decennalia* in the year July AD 315 to July AD 316. His magnificent triumphal arch in Rome, dedicated to him by the Senate, was probably inaugurated on this occasion.

Recently it has been suggested that the York head had undergone recarving to turn the portrait face and hair into the likeness of Constantine, and that indeed the head was originally that of Hadrian (reigned AD 117-138). In support of this theory it should be remembered that on the Arch of Constantine in Rome use was made of *spolia* from earlier monuments to the so-called 'good emperors' Trajan and Hadrian to create almost a collage effect, and that the very bodies of these earlier emperors were also visually appropriated by their faces being recarved to the face of Constantine. This would certainly provide a parallel to the York recarving, if the overall theory is accepted.

It seems apposite to introduce here mention of the larger than life-size gilt bronze leg and shod foot from what would have been a massive equestrian statue (see Figure 5), as indicated by a hole in the foot's heel for attachment of a spur, found in a bog at Milsington, near Hawick, Borders, Scotland. Dating to some time between AD 100-180 the statue is most likely to have been of one of the emperors of this period, but if not an emperor almost certainly a provincial governor, given that not only is it a highly-accomplished work of art, evident even just from the highly-detailed fragment that has come down to us, but that it would have been extraordinarily expensive to cast, assemble, and gild. The statue would appear to have been carefully dismantled, as the upper part of the leg is undamaged, and taken to the bog to be disposed of, perhaps in a ritual of some kind about which we can only speculate.

Of course, images of emperors could appear in other media, most obviously in the form of portraits on coins, as has already been mentioned, but also on carved gemstones or intaglios. Nearly all the examples so far recovered from sites in northern Britain are of more or less the same period, interestingly enough.

Just as there would appear to be a spike in numbers of sculptures in general in northern Britain in the second and third centuries AD, probably associated with the campaigns of Antoninus Pius and Septimius Severus, so there was especially in the production of certain types of images which held a particularly place in the iconography of these dynasties. It is not altogether surprising then that we might be able to see a similar trend among the assemblage of engraved gemstones from the north. Martin Henig, the pre-eminent scholar of such small artworks, would appear to be sympathetic to the idea mooted by Adrian Marsden that some kind of mobile glyptic or gemcutters' workshop formed part of the official entourage of Severus when he was on campaign in Britain. If this can be accepted as having been the case, it would certainly provide further testimony, if it were needed, of the vital importance of visual propaganda to this particular emperor and his family and immediate successors. While Marsden has suggested the workshop to have been sited well behind the lines, away from the militarised north, Henig sees no reason why this had to have been the case and suggests that the workshop could in fact have been in York, or further north still at South Shields. Certainly the finding of a small number of intaglios bearing portrait images of members of the Severan house and an interesting concentration of images of deities and other subjects known to have been close to their hearts further supports this theory, even if it does not necessarily prove it.

A bearded Antonine figure on a nicolo from Vindolanda may well be Commodus. It is possible that the three male figures on a gem from Castlesteads in Cumbria are Septimius Severus (reigned AD 193-211), in the guise of the eastern deity Serapis whom he so admired and identified with, flanked by his sons Geta and Caracalla. The three letter Greek inscription names Zeus and Serapis but not the imperial figures. A red jasper intaglio of Caracalla (reigned AD 198-217) comes from Newstead, Scotland and the same emperor also appears as Mercury on another red jasper intaglio and in the guise of Hercules on a sardonyx cameo, both from South Shields. A young Geta (died AD 211) is possibly to be identified on a red jasper intaglio from Birdoswald. The empress Agrippina I appears in the form of a portrait bust on a blue glass cameo from Stanwix, Cumbria.

The question arises as to who would have commissioned and worn rings holding such gems? Wearing such a ring might have implied a generalised loyalty to Rome, but was surely more likely to have been worn by an official serving the particular emperor or dynasty whose image or images the gemstone bore and who might have used such a ring as an official seal on documents. Rings bearing intaglios were both functional objects and art objects in many cases. The engraved gem was unique in being an artwork that had the ability and capacity to replicate itself through applying a seal. The interplay of seals and sealing is of great interest, as is how seals were used and what sealing practices meant for the functioning of ancient bureaucracies. Further evidence for official sealing at the time is provided by a piece of impressed lead



Figure 11 Head pot of a woman, possibly the empress Julia Domna, from York. Early third century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).

sealing from South Shields bearing the image of Severus, flanked as usual by his sons Caracalla and Geta.

Emperors, of course, could also allude to themselves or be alluded to in a less direct manner, as with Septimius Severus and his dedication to Serapis, or Commodus to Hercules, and Caracalla to Commodus and thus to Hercules as well. Caracalla's great baths complex in Rome featured statues of Hercules, Bacchus, Mars, Venus, Virtus, and Fortuna both to highlight and to advertise the emperor's superhuman ancestry and his cultural

and political affiliations. Thus in some ways in this context these gods and goddesses and personifications stood in for the emperor and represented him *in absentia*. Indeed, it has been suggested that the Severan dynasty co-opted symbols and tropes from the earlier Antonine dynasty of which they bizarrely claimed membership as a form of establishing legitimacy for their rule. It is likely that at those sites where there is evidence for the worship of Jupiter Dolichenus and his consort Juno Regina, as discussed in Chapter Four, such worship was actually more of a cult linked to the contemporary emperor and his dynasty who particularly aligned themselves with these eastern deities.

It is perhaps surprising that when Septimius Severus made York the headquarters for his massive military expedition in northern Britain, perhaps the biggest Roman military operation in Britain since the Claudian invasion, that there are not more images of the emperor and his family from the region. Certainly, mention has already been made of the small but significant number of engraved gemstones carrying images of the Severans, but much more unusually it is possible that some ceramic, that is pottery, images might have been created to mark the imperial presence in the city.

In the early third century AD potteries at York produced a number of types of pottery vessels which probably reflected the foodways and regional cultural traditions of North African troops stationed in the region, initially as part of the vast Severan military taskforce. One particular form of vessel which had no cultural antecedents



Figure 12 Head pot of a man, possibly the emperor Caracalla, from York. Early third century AD. Yorkshire, Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).

in Roman Britain but which is found in Roman North Africa was the head pot, that is a pottery vessel in the form of a life-size, or almost life-size, three dimensional human head. About fifty such vessels, complete and fragmentary, have been recovered from excavations at York, and many appear to have been used as cremation containers. However, two of these pots, one of a female head and the other of a male head, might actually be ceramic portraits of some kind, both having been found in burial contexts. The female head pot (Figure 11), with its highly-fashionable hairstyle, in the

form of an elaborate wig, rendered by the potter in great detail, bears a remarkable resemblance to the official portraiture of the empress Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus. There are six types of official portrait of the empress, as defined by art historians, each bearing a variation on her trademark wig, though all recognisable by her very distinctive physiognomy. The Fishergate cemetery York head pot bears a striking resemblance to the so-called Leptis portrait type of Julia. The male head pot from Priory Street (Figure 12) bears some resemblance to Caracalla, Septimius' and Julia's oldest son, and to his Tivoli portrait type, though the modelling of the York male head pot is nowhere near as accomplished as the work on the female one, making the task of comparing physiognomy difficult. Certainly the fact that the man appears to be wearing a diadem or wreath may mark him out as more than an ordinary citizen and the fact that his hair recedes a little from off his forehead, as did Caracalla's, may also be telling.

If these head pots were images of Julia Domna and, less likely, of Caracalla what might their significance have been? With the imperial court present at York it is possible that souvenir items portraying individual members of the imperial family could have produced in a North African cultural ceramic style to mark the occasion. Alternatively it could have been that the imperial presence had a knock-on effect in terms of inspiring the elite of York to imitate and copy imperial hairstyles and fashions, a phenomenon well attested at Rome and in many other places throughout the empire. Such pots could have been produced to be given as gifts to local dignitaries, which

might account for why the cremated remains of a private individual might be buried inside a ceramic facsimile of an imperial image. The possible interpretations of these two enigmatic pots are numerous, yet none of them is altogether conclusive.

Another theme that may be worth exploring now is the third century AD phenomenon of certain of the imperial women being granted the title of *Mater Castrorum*-or Mother of the Camps-linking them as formal patronesses to the well-being and successes of the Roman army. Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus, and Julia Mamaea, mother of Severus Alexander, were both granted this title. Dedications to Julia Domna in this role in the north come from South Shields, Netherby, Risingham, and Newcastle. Dedications to Julia Mamaea come from Ribchester and High Rochester. It was in fact though Faustina the Younger, wife of Marcus Aurelius, who first was granted the title *Mater Castrorum* we learn from coin inscriptions.

There may have been other instances in which the link between the *Mater Castrorum* and the Roman army in northern Britain was expressed in visual terms. It has been suggested by Mark Hassall that the wingless victories which appeared on a number of artworks from the north represented specific imperial women, perhaps in their guise as the *Mater Castrorum*. The most interesting of these wingless victories appears on the legionary distance slab from Hutcheson Hill on the Antonine Wall in Scotland (Figure 13). At the centre of the scene, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six, this female figure crowns a legionary standard bearer with a victory wreath in an architectural setting, with bound barbarian captives present. If not Victory herself, then who might this female figure be? It could be that she is *Britannia*, the deity personifying the conquered province, but this seems unlikely. She could be the deified Faustina the Elder, the late wife of emperor Antoninus Pius. Certainly Diva Faustina's image and dedications to her appeared on coins for many years after her premature death in AD 141, while images of victories were used in the Temple to Antoninus Pius and the deified Faustina in the Roman Forum. Though not formally inducted as *Mater Castrorum*, as far as we know, there is certainly historical evidence that she was very highly regarded by the army. Could this be both an image of an empress and Victory in one person? There are certainly a few parallels for an empress also being portrayed as Victory, though these images, of Julia Domna, come from elsewhere in the empire.

Inscribed dedications in the region to various personified virtues such as *Virtus*, *Victoria*, *Disciplina*, and *Fortuna* can be assumed in many cases to have also been tied in to the acknowledgement of the imperial virtues, and thus with the generalised success of the Roman empire rather than simply having been the celebration of a purely abstract concept.

This brings us back to the question of the visual impact of images on coins that circulated freely and widely among the peoples of Roman Britain, both north and south. Did anyone in the province ever closely examine coins and ponder over the



Figure 13 The Hutcheson Hill, Dunbartonshire legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland.
Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. (Photo: Copyright Hunterian, University of Glasgow).

images on them? Do we do so today? Roman coins, certainly of the imperial era, not only carried portraits of the emperor and sometimes of empresses on the obverse, the only opportunity for many to view a likeness or ideal likeness of their ruler, but they also carried an image on the reverse that was itself highly significant in presenting further visual ideas about a particular ruler and indeed to deliberately expand the many meanings of the portraits and stress legitimacy. The obverse image was often of a deity with whom the emperor wished to be associated, almost a form of divine patronage. Often martial or heroic analogies were made by this image, or associations would be forged with traditional and easily-presented images of virtues, as discussed in the case of dedicatory inscriptions above. This helped to forge associations of meaning in the minds of viewers of the coins if they were so predisposed or knowledgeable to do so. Heroism, divine protection, and triumph were the principal themes being promulgated. An image of Jupiter, the father of the gods, on a coin reverse suggested both the great power of the emperor but also his paternal role as father of the Roman people. An image of Hercules immediately associated the emperor with heroic deeds, even if his reign had seen very few. Hercules also symbolised the emperor's latent propensity to recourse to violent actions and his military power.

The very fact that in the later Roman period the minting of coins was inextricably linked to the paying of the army meant that the opportunity to literally put a simple

visual message into a soldier's hand and through that into his mind was heavily exploited. These images could be enhanced with simple slogans that would appeal directly to the troops, such as *gloria exercitus*-‘to the glory of the army’-or *ubique vicitur*-‘victor everywhere’. Women of the imperial family might associate themselves with a coin reverse image of Venus or of Ceres, for instance, and thus with ideas centred on love, maternity, and fertility. Stressing the femininity of an empress in this way represented a pendant motif to the stressing of the manliness of the emperor through martial and heroic imagery and associations.

The dominant messages on coins of the third century AD were to do with the military achievements of the emperor, with his divine associations, most usually with Jupiter, Hercules, Mars, Sol, and Apollo, the promotion of this particular era as some kind of golden age, using figures as concepts such as *Felicitas*, *Pax*, *Securitas*, and *Salus*, and the glorification of imperial virtues such as *providentia*, *liberalitas*, *virtus*, *pietas*, and *aequitas*. The messages on the coins issued under Septimius Severus and the Severan dynasty would have probably had a particularly potent impact on viewers of these images in the Roman north.

In this chapter it has been suggested that in the person of the Roman emperor we can see an identity that was both everywhere and yet nowhere at the same time in northern Roman Britain. This uncanny, coexisting presence and absence, mediated by authored and controlled images representing both political authority and divine power, must often have seemed like a dream state to those living under Roman rule. However, as packages these images were as immensely seductive and appealing as the images of the presiding gods and goddesses to whom the peoples of the north turned to for religious and emotional succour and support, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Gods and Mortals

In setting out the parameters of this study it has already been proposed that its objective is to marry discussion of art and identity in northern Roman Britain, a process in which religion, both formal and informal, played a highly-significant role, as it did in ancient life in general.

A Sacred Landscape

There is perhaps no better illustration of the potential jeopardy felt by many of those living in the Roman north than the large number of religious dedications made at sites there. The north was very much a sacred landscape created out of religious performance. The *genius* in the Roman world was a protective spirit, sometimes very specifically connected to men and sometimes with the gods, but most commonly in northern Roman Britain with natural places. It is therefore quite possible that the significant number of dedications of decorated altars or sculptures to *genii* in the region perhaps reflected the desire and need for those coming here from outside the area to seek protection from the very spirits of the place itself or to claim affinity with them through vows. This is particularly interesting in that it very firmly linked these individuals with the northern landscape, in the same way that I will argue elsewhere in this book that the invoking of the regional topography and geology also can be seen to have been part of a bonding exercise, intended to throw a web of security over the people of the region.

The division between sacred and profane landscapes was not at this time always stable and permanent. Indeed, it was often reconfigured by communities of worshippers. The materiality and physicality of sacred spaces and places preserved the memories of multiple ritual performances over time. Religious sacrifice was itself highly-particularised and a locally-mapped practice. At such places conservation and innovation often comfortably existed alongside each other.

Interestingly, Martin Henig has recently highlighted the significant number of intaglios or carved gemstones from northern Roman Britain whose designs openly or covertly alluded to ideas centred around living in a sacred landscape or to bucolic reverie of some kind. These intaglios referenced a number of what at first sight might seem disparate themes but which Henig sees, quite correctly I believe, as being somehow ideologically connected. A third century AD gemstone from Vindolanda carries a carved depiction of the shepherd Faustulus coming upon the She-Wolf suckling the twins Romulus and Remus, part of a Roman foundation myth discussed more fully above in Chapter One.

Similar evocations of timeless sacro-idyllic landscapes can also be found as images on gems from Newstead in Scotland, carrying representations of a satyr in one case and a dancing maenad in another, from Carlisle, on which a pan-pipes playing satyr appears, and from Vindolanda where Pan appears on a gemstone. Just as it has been suggested that a rustic shrine of some sort is depicted on the silver plate known as the Corbridge *Lanx*, so similar small structures can be seen depicted on carved gemstones from Corbridge, Mumrills in Scotland, and Vindolanda again. The appeal of images of rustic hunter deities would also seem to have quite naturally been reflected in shrines in the north, such as that to Vinotonus on Scargill Moor, County Durham, and on gemstones we can cite the appearance of an image of a hunter holding up a dead hare from South Shields as an image of the conflated deity Silvanus Cocidius, to whom a shrine was dedicated here in the north at Bewcastle in Cumbria.

These images were in many cases mediated through cosmopolitan ideals: they provided a seductive nostalgia and doubtless a savoured melancholy. However, it could also be argued that they somehow helped to propose a way to understand the new northern landscapes in which their owners now found themselves. While some of the countryside in the north had a military and strategic value, or was of productive importance for feeding the army, much of it would seem to have become more and more an amenity to be appreciated and consumed, almost like one of the fictive landscapes on the gemstones.

Such idyllic landscapes could perhaps be seen as examples of both moral order and aesthetic harmony but order and harmony which in their contemporary historical setting could only be achieved through the elimination of disturbing particularities. *Romanitas* was here asserted through the fictive landscape of an art in which conflict and its contemporary environment, along with its resultant anxiety, was smoothed away, or at least temporarily erased. Memory now came to rely on geographical and not temporal difference, an imagined space but not an imagined time.

These intaglio or gemstone images were highly personal pieces of art in that it is likely that their commissioners and original owners had probably chosen their own design to be cut into the gemstone, reflecting some facet of their individual personality or personal ideology and beliefs. Gemstone images, even in Roman Britain, often more readily followed precepts of artistic representation and depicted classical themes in a more mainstream manner than the art of sculpture in the province. Whether these gemstones, set in rings originally, all belonged to what we would call incomers to the province is uncertain, though they would have been expensive items to commission and purchase and it is likely that the rings themselves were made elsewhere in the empire rather than in *Britannia*. As Martin Henig has himself noted there is no real unequivocal evidence for a gem-cutter's workshop from any site in Roman Britain so far discovered.



Figure 14 Red jasper intaglio of a cock pulling a cart driven by a mouse from Aldborough, North Yorkshire. Second half of second century AD. Aldborough Site Museum. (Photo: Historic England).

One of the northern gemstones illustrated here, a red jasper intaglio from Aldborough (Figure 14), carries a depiction carved on it of a mouse driving a chariot pulled by a cock. Such images were rooted in the everyday, and to some extent humorous, but their creation and consumption was underpinned by belief in a higher symbolic order. Indeed, the prophetic power of these works lay in their allusion to what was then universally felt and experienced, but which was ultimately unexplainable. It is, however, but a short step to view their range from intensely psychological to hallucinatory and prophetic, emphasising the transformative power of vision and above all else the redemptive and purifying power of the local landscape.

I will return to the subject matter of intaglios later in the book when I discuss the issue of the presentation and representation of male and hyper-masculine identity in the context of the identity of soldiers in the Roman army. Here, consideration needs to be given to a number of artworks in other media which also engage with the idea of personifying place.

In terms of evidence for the evocation of sacro-idyllic landscapes or the yearning for Rome's mythical deep past, both these themes to some extent meet in a pedimental relief and two conjoining relief panels from Corbridge Roman fort. It is thought that these unusual, indeed unique, artworks came from a third century AD shrine to *Roma Aeterna*, a conceptual symbol of other lands, of other landscapes. The pedimental relief is badly damaged, but clearly bears an image of the She-Wolf facing towards the left and suckling the twins Romulus and Remus. Two vines issue forth from craters or urns in the two lower corners of the pediment, their branches and tendrils surrounding the central figures. One of the panels is very badly damaged, the other less so. However, it is possible to make out the overall design. On both of the conjoined panels are craters once more, out of which again grow vigorous vines, whose branches bearing leaves and tendrils spread across the panels. On the right hand panel is the much-damaged

body of a woodland faun playing a pipe, his right foot resting on a large rock. A small animal on the ground beside him, of which little but a paw survives, may have been a dog. A tree next to the faun branches out across from one panel to the other.

The image of the She-Wolf and twins is common in Roman art in general but not that common in Roman Britain, though mention was made in Chapter One of the mosaic panel from Aldborough, North Yorkshire bearing this image, and it also occurs as a stamped motif on some samian pottery from the northern region. However, here at Corbridge the appearance in sculptural form of the founding myth of the city of Rome, albeit in a local, provincial style of representation, is of huge interest. It may well be, as some have suggested, that there was a further pair of relief panels present that have not survived, and that an appropriate motif on these would have been a nymph, to add balance to the image of the faun, and to personify Virgil's famous line in the *Aeneid* that the site of what was to become the city of Rome was inhabited by nymphs and fauns. E.J. Phillips, who catalogued these works in the very first volume of the CSIR for Britain, wondered if the artist behind the decorative scheme for the shrine might have had access to an illustrated copy of Virgil's text that inspired the design. However, given that the existence of a nymph panel is purely circumstantial it might rather be that the military artist had access to design illustrations that variously combined vines, trees, rocks, satyrs, and the She-Wolf and twins as evocative of the setting for the founding of Rome. Of course, some of these elements are present on the *Ara Pacis Augustae* or Augustan Altar of Peace in Rome. There landscape elements, birds, and trailing foliage were used to evoke rustic harmony secured by the Augustan peace. Indeed, it would have been altogether appropriate for an image of *Roma* or *Tellus* to appear on the artworks inside the Corbridge shrine to *Roma Aeterna*, as she does so dominantly on the *Ara Pacis*.

Pagan Roman culture and society functioned to some extent on its need for the constant referencing of its deep past of myth and ritual, and of a shared Greco-Roman cultural heritage. Interactions between the world of mortals in Rome and the lives of the gods mediated through religious rites helped maintain social cohesion and, later, underpin Roman imperial power. Living with myths must have been a reality to some extent. In the case of the city of Rome this deep past also included its own complex foundation myths and was peopled with figures such as Aeneas, Rhea Silvia, Romulus and Remus, the shepherd Faustulus and his wife Acca Larentia, the Sabine women, and Tarpeia. Myths therefore could sometimes mirror, strengthen, and, on some occasions, even subvert societal norms, including gender ideologies, and therefore their reading is often reliant on context. Unfortunately, in the case of many Roman works of art information about their original context of discovery and acquisition is simply not available, and the same applies to the situation in Roman Britain.

Systems and Practices

Discussion of religion in Roman Britain almost inevitably must rely on the use of a categorisation of deities that places them either in the Classical tradition, the native or ‘Celtic’ tradition, or in a mixed tradition. Syncretism of classical and native deities, common in the Roman provinces, can be seen as the combination of two or more pure traditions, but the picture would appear to have been more complicated than that. Syncretism represents a process by which native or indigenous signs and symbols, and religious and ideological discourses and practices were assembled into novel religious idioms. The creation of discrete religious worlds and social sites where religious expression could be formalised allowed the idea that numerous gods too somehow inhabited this landscape to reorder native concepts rather than to replace them. Whether the impetus towards the process of syncretism came from Roman or other incomers to the province or from within the native populations, or both groups, must remain uncertain. A divergence from classical styles of representation when it took place might in itself have been an indigenous response that carried echoes of a conscious cultural resistance, but such instances are virtually impossible to identify in the archaeological record with any certainty.

It has been suggested by Miranda Green and others that certain religious images from Roman Britain may have deliberately eschewed classical style as a form of subversion or open opposition. Similarly Stephanie Moat has recently proposed the theory that some religious artworks from the province, including a small number from the northern region, constituted examples of ‘assertive mimesis’, that is copying that displayed a hyper-assertive capacity to subvert.

In the archaeological record religious syncretism can be reflected in a number of ways, but principally by the double-naming of deities, thus conflating a native deity with a classical deity, or by the creation of an image of a deity which was not within the classical mainstream. But this process would not appear to have been that common in northern Roman Britain, if we go by reading dedicatory inscriptions alone. Having the epigraphic habit was the privilege of particular socio-economic or class groups in the ancient world and thus the evidence from inscriptions can only ever represent a partial and biased record of religious practices in this instance.

Statistics gathered by Amy Zoll in the mid-1990s on religious dedications in Roman Britain broadly still hold true, though of course further discoveries have been made by archaeology in the intervening twenty five years to be added to her database, and her figures provide fascinating data on the unique situation in the Roman north. Taken together, the Hadrian’s Wall zone, other parts of northern England, and Scotland account for 80% of votive religious inscriptions from Roman Britain as a whole, some 738 individual dedications. Of these 738 dedications 34 are of double-named, that is syncretised, deities.



Figure 15 Relief of Mercury from Newcastle upon Tyne. Second or third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

As with many aspects of Roman society, religious affiliation could often be a signifier of status and class identity. The Capitoline cult of the triad of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva was very much a patrician cult, and later also linked to imperial ideology and concerns, as was later to be the cult of the Magna Mater or Cybele, though that had a much lesser link with the imperial system. At some periods this very much operated in opposition to the plebeian cult of the triad of Ceres, Liber, and Libera. In Roman Britain the division in religious affiliation was not so evidently based on class, with the deities popular in Rome and Italy with the plebeian classes largely absent as images and artworks.

In numerical terms by far and away the most popular gods in the northern region were Jupiter and Mars who together represented around 43% of the region's total identifiable sculptural works relating to Greco-Roman deities, as catalogued in volumes of the CSIR. *Genii* of various kinds were numerically the third most common deities, though mainly represented by decorated altars rather than by sculptural images as such, followed by Victory and *Matres* of various types. Mercury (Figure 15), Hercules, and Fortuna are then represented by very similar numbers of artworks, with Minerva following with around half of their number. Given the heavily-militarised nature of the northern region such a ranking of classical deities can be thought of as reflecting the realities of the region's identity, with Jupiter, Mars, Victory, and Hercules linked to ideas of military endeavour and triumph, and to some extent to a culture of heightened hyper-masculinity. The relatively low figure for Mercury in these rankings, though also represented like most of the classical deities by statuettes and figurines in bronze as will be discussed below, perhaps reflects the secondary role that economic matters took in the region outside of army contracts and supply. It cannot always be assumed though that male deities were always associated with male concerns, or vice versa. For instance, an image of a semi-naked Venus inside a classical building appears on a now-fragmentary Antonine commemorative stone of the Sixth Legion from Croy Hill, Dunbartonshire, Scotland (Figure 16).



Figure 16 Fragment of a commemorative relief of the Sixth Legion from Croy Hill, Dunbartonshire, Scotland, depicting Venus inside a classical building. Antonine. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).

Native deities, often conflated with a Roman equivalent or very specifically hyper-local or regional in significance, were commonly depicted as images and named in dedications on altars. There are around 120 finds of statuary images or inscriptions on decorated altars relating to Romano-Celtic deities, that is around 20% of images linked to identified deities. Three examples of the name of the northern region's defining goddess *Brigantia* are known from inscriptions, but only a single image. Most notable among the other female Romano-Celtic deities are images of the nymph *Coventina* and of *matres* or mother goddesses, as will be discussed below.

The two most common male native deities named in dedicatory inscriptions in the Roman north are *Cocidius*, represented by seventeen examples, and *Belatucadrus*, represented by twenty eight occurrences of his name. *Belatucadrus*'s name in all cases appears paired with Roman Mars. No images of the god are known. *Cocidius* appears again most commonly name-paired with Mars, but also with *Silvanus* and another native deity *Vernostonus*, and appears in a number of images, often as a horned warrior or hunter deity.

By using artistic images to manifest a god or goddess's presence Roman religion conflated the image with lived reality, and it is likely that people came to know the gods only through the creation and manipulation of such indirect 'likenesses'. But the multiplicity and adaptability of deities and their characteristics was fertile seed for

the aesthetic imagination, leading to and feeding into regional art styles throughout the empire, even in Italy itself.

Much of the art discussed in this chapter was created at military sites as part of the process of following what is believed to have been a standard Roman military calendar of festivals. A copy of such a calendar in the form of a papyrus document found in the temple of Artemis Azzanathkona at the eastern site of Dura Europos on the River Euphrates in present-day Syria gives us an insight into the types of events celebrated, such as rites associated with the major deities of the classical pantheon, particularly Jupiter, and imperial anniversaries. The Dura calendar—the *Feriale Duranum*—should not necessarily be expected to have reflected the reality of official religious practice and observance at all Roman forts across the empire during the whole Roman period, but at least it provides a template for understanding the ideological connection between Roman military life and religious rites, and between quotidian routine for most of the military and their links to a broad, deep tradition that connected them to ancient gods and ancient rites. The *Feriale Duranum* dates to around AD 225–235. A structured programme of religious rites such as this would have given meaning and routine to military life and would have engendered a strong group identity for all those in the army.

But in addition to this official calendared framework for religious practice other religious activity went on at fort sites and sometimes outside of fort sites, involving individual soldiers, or groups and units of soldiers, and these unofficial military religious activities as some archaeologists might term them, also often involved the requirement for the creation of an inscription or artwork to physicalise vows made to the gods and to mark the occasion for posterity. While it is easy to see that shrines to local deities such as the Romano-Celtic Coventina at Carrawburgh and Antenociticus at Benwell had to be sited outside forts because their worship did not fit in with Roman military norms of worship, it is more difficult to see why worship of Jupiter Dolichenus had to generally take place outside of forts, given that his worship was often tied in to the sharing of an imperial preference for the god in various reigns. The worship of Mithras again took place outside of forts, yet its adherents were probably all senior military officers.

Yet inside forts incongruous religious material has sometimes been found, such as the two silver plaques carrying images of, and a dedication to, Mars Cocidius, a regional Romano-Celtic deity, found in the headquarters building at Bewcastle. What was officially sanctioned religious activity within the Roman military is hard for us to define today, given such unusual examples of practice as these. Three *sacerdotes* or priests are recorded by inscriptions in the Roman north. Among these was the priestess (*archiereia*) Diodora who in the third century AD dedicated an altar at Corbridge to Hercules of Tyre. The altar is now in the British Museum, London.

As the Diodora dedication demonstrates, religion was important to both men and women in the Roman north and we should not simply see religious expression in the region as being a manifestation of, or a reaction to, the huge military presence here, and that women need not necessarily have always felt the need to self-identify with female deities alone. However, these examples and the large assemblage of other religious material discussed in this chapter demonstrate that religious observance was indisputably tied in to the fabric of the everyday lives of all the inhabitants of the northern region in the Roman period, whether military or civilian, and that visualisation of the gods through words and images was a hugely important facet of religious practice here as elsewhere in the Roman world.

Private Devotion

A recent study by Emma Durham of figurines from Roman Britain, very much building and expanding on earlier work by Miranda Green, examined an assemblage of around 1000 mostly bronze figurines recovered by excavation and metal detecting from sites around the whole of Britain. The vast majority of these have been found to the south of the northern frontier zone with which this present book is concerned. Eighty four of these figurines come from the north, that is just 8.4% of the overall total of figurines for Roman Britain. That is interesting in itself, of course. What northern finds there are generally cluster at sites along Hadrian's Wall and along the line of the Roman road going north from York to Corbridge and its western branch from south of Piercebridge, through Brougham, and on to Carlisle. Most of the northern figurines occur as either single finds at individual sites or sometimes in twos. Sites with three figurines or more are: Carlisle and Carzield (three figurines at each); Benwell and Papcastle (four figurines at each); Kirkby Thore and Vindolanda (five figurines at each); Piercebridge (six); Chester, Corbridge and South Shields (seven at each); and York, from where come 14 figurines.

Deities represented among the northern material include Mercury (from Benwell, Chester, Corbridge, Great Chesters, Ribchester, and Vindolanda, and post-Durham from Selby), Bacchus (from Carzield and possibly Papcastle), Priapus (from both Benwell and Carzield), Jupiter (from Kirkby Thore, Manchester, Piercebridge, and South Shields), Hercules (most famously from Birdoswald, but also from Chester, Kirkby Thore, and South Shields), Mars (from Chester), Juno (from Chester), Cupids (from Chester, Kirkby Thore, and Moresby), Fortuna (possibly from Brough and Lanchester and post-Durham study from Gainford, County Durham), Harpocrates (from Chester), Minerva (from Benwell and post-Durham from Berryhill, Scotland), and Venus (possibly from York). It will be apparent from reading this list that no Romano-Celtic deities are present here, and it must therefore be assumed that the commissioning of figurines was not part of the religious rites involved in the worship of those particular deities.

Comparing the deities represented as figurines or statuettes with those represented in sculptural form or to whom decorated altars were dedicated, while Jupiter (four figurines), Hercules (four figurines) and Mars (two figurines) together represent another reflection of the region's fondness for martial and heroic deities, though nowhere near as convincingly in the figures of numbers of sculptures, it is Mercury (six figurines) who is the best represented deity, albeit out of a relatively-small total assemblage. Mercury was the sixth-best represented deity in the statuary assemblage from the north, and indeed he is the best-represented deity in the form of a figurine in the whole of Roman Britain, so it may well have been that the god's image was more useful to believers, those perhaps involved in commerce or regular travellers, in the portable form of a figurine or for placement in a home or personal shrine. We are certainly seeing in the case of the martial gods and Mercury that they were worshipped in different ways to each other in the northern region, in terms of the use of their images in the process of religious practice.

Notable individual figurines from the north include: three figurines of captives, from perhaps Brough, Corbridge, and possibly from Binchester; the figurine of a plough team from Piercebridge; figurines of a veiled priestess holding a sacrificial *patera* from South Shields, a bare-headed one with a *patera* from Stanwix, and Vindolanda; a possible figure of a priest from each of Papcastle and York; a scholar from Vindolanda; a lar from each of Papcastle and Bewcastle; and a *genius* and dog together from Coventina's Well at Carrawburgh.

Another type of object from Roman Britain which would appear to have had specific religious or funerary functions was the pipeclay figurine. These items were produced in some quantity in central Gaul and the Cologne region, particularly in the first and second centuries AD, and were widely traded and sold across the western Empire. The most common type was the Venus or Pseudo-Venus figurine, another common type being the so-called *Dea Nutrix* or nursing mother figure. More specialised items in pipeclay included models of animals and other figures which occasionally accompanied burials in the southern part of the province. According to figures collected by Miranda Green in the late 1970s pipeclay Venus figurines come from at least fifteen different sites in the north, *Dea Nutrix* figurines from ten sites, and a number of other figures are recorded, such as Mercury from Corbridge and York, Bacchus from Bootle-in-Cumberland and York, and Cybele from Corbridge.

One of the Venus figurines comes from Binchester and would perhaps have originally been used at the site as an *ex voto* either in a household shrine or perhaps in a more formal religious context related to the well-attested cult of the *Matres Ollototae* at the site, a cult otherwise only attested at Heronbridge, near Chester, and at Manchester. At Binchester there are a number of altars dedicated to them, but until 2018 there had been no images of the *Matres* found at the site: however, a rough statue of a single mother seated holding something on her lap was recently found just outside one of

the fort's gates. But notably the Binchester Venus figurine would appear to have been deliberately cut, its deliberate but careful mutilation and fragmentation marking another possible symbolic or ritual role for the object, perhaps also reflected in its final disposal by burial in a pit or ritual pit (*a favissa*) at the site. Such pre-depositional damaging of Venus or Pseudo-Venus figurines might have been part of a wider trend in the treatment of such items in certain specific contexts. Other examples from elsewhere in Roman Britain are also partial, one from Colchester excavated from a grave in the Butt Road cemetery. I have noted elsewhere a trend for the customisation of certain types of objects in Roman Britain to transform them into anatomical *ex votos* and in this context have cited the appearance of cut or neatly-broken Venus figurines represented by three or four sets of feet, torsos, and separate heads from Caerleon and Canterbury where a broken Pseudo-Venus figurine was placed in a cremation burial.

Personal Spaces

Certain types of brooches could also have had a personal religious significance for their owners, such as those brooches associated with the cult of Mercury in the form of a purse or money bag, a rare type, one of only four known examples from Roman Britain coming from Cramond in Scotland.

Another category of item of which we have a sizeable assemblage from the Roman north, and thus which can provide some quantified data, is the intaglio ring with engraved gemstone bearing religious imagery. Martin Henig first produced his magisterial corpus of engraved gemstones from Roman Britain in 1974 and it was subsequently updated in 1978, the third edition of 2007 providing further discussion but with no further new catalogue entries added. Thus the corpus provides a snapshot of the situation at a particular time and therefore the quantification produced here must be read with that in mind, though it may well be that post-1978 finds of intaglios in northern Britain and the rest of the province have helped maintain the same relative percentage ratios in both zones.

In total, in Henig's corpus 1024 intaglios are catalogued (I have omitted jet cameos and lead sealings), of which 281 intaglios come from the Roman north as defined in this present study, that is 27.44% of the total figure for the province as a whole. These engraved gemstones come from 65 different sites. The largest collections of ten gemstones or more in the catalogue come from Vindolanda (30 examples), York (27 examples), Corbridge (26 examples), Newstead (22 examples), Aldborough (19 examples), South Shields (18 examples), Chesters (17 examples), Chester (16 examples), and Housesteads (10 examples): added together, these nine sites account for almost 66% of the finds of engraved gemstones from the north. It is known though that a programme of systematic fieldwalking at and around the site of Newstead has produced many more intaglios and the site is probably now second only to York in terms of numbers now recorded from there.

We must not think of all the intaglios in Roman Britain as having been engraved elsewhere and imported here for sale or brought here, set in rings, by their individual owners. However, most probably were imported in one way or another, otherwise there is no way to account for the dichotomy between the subject matter of most of the sculpture of Roman Britain which usually eschews depiction of the more complex mythological subjects that often featured on intaglios. Certainly Martin Henig and others believe that there is a strong possibility that when Septimius Severus was personally campaigning in northern Britain in AD 208-211 that gem cutters formed part of the imperial and military entourage, there to produce intaglios which would reflect the glory of the wars and imperial victory, almost a kind of instantaneous news reporting.

Using the data in the Henig catalogue it has been calculated that 152 carved gemstones from the north, that is 54% of the northern gemstones, carry representations of or allusions to specific deities, broken down in numerical order as follows: Bonus Eventus (16 examples-10.52% of all northern gems portraying deities), satyrs (15 examples-9.86%), Mercury, Victory, and Cupid (10 examples of each-6.57% each), Jupiter (9 examples), Minerva (7 examples), Mars (6 examples), Mars Gradivus (4 examples), and Venus, Fortuna, and Ceres (6 examples of each). Present in smaller numbers were images of Juno, Neptune, Priapus, Silvanus, Apollo, Diana, and Hercules. As for the eastern deities which figure so heavily among the statuary and decorated altars from the region the examples of their images on intaglios will be discussed in Chapter Four. No Romano-Celtic gods appeared on engraved gemstones from the north, with the exception of the Silvanus Cocidius gemstone from South Shields mentioned above.

One of the most interesting things hinted at in this list of deities on gemstones is the importance of Ceres to six individuals (at York, Corbridge (three examples), Vindolanda, and Whalley, Lancashire) when she is otherwise virtually absent from the sculpture of Roman Britain as a whole.

These figures can be compared to the breakdowns of numbers of individual deities represented by sculptures or decorated altars in the CSIR volumes and by figurines in Emma Durham's catalogue. In terms of deities portrayed intaglio images and figurine images were exclusively of deities in the Greco-Roman pantheon. These were not media for the portrayal or invocation of the many regional or local Romano-Celtic deities of northern Roman Britain. Even among sculptures in stone only a small number appeared in visual form-for instance Coventina and Antenociticus, most of the others being summoned or corresponded with through inscriptions only. Certain deities would seem to have been worshipped in different ways, that is using different types of artistic media to carry their images and help mediate between the commissioners or owners of such artworks and their favoured or chosen god or goddess.

Religious imagery could also appear on pottery. A small number of pots with applied decoration from the northern region would appear to have been one-offs or part of a small series, with some of these depicting a regional smith god perhaps conflated with Vulcan, apparently being manufactured in or near Corbridge, Malton, and Norton. Two main types are known: a bearded man brandishing a smith's tongs and hammer and a non-figurative type on which carefully-modelled hammers, tongs, and anvils appeared, the example of the latter type illustrated here coming from Chester-le-Street in County Durham and dating to the later second or third century AD (Figure 17). A smith depicted standing in a niche on an undated stone from York might also be an image of this self-same smith god or of Vulcan (Figure 18). It is also possible that this could be an unfinished tombstone for a working smith in York, but funerary monuments to workers, artisans, and professionals, while common in Italy, Gaul, and Germany in particular, are otherwise absent in Roman Britain.

The Power of Place

The number of Romano-Celtic deities represented either by statuary images or named in inscriptions on decorated altars in the north is around 120, that is around 20% of images linked to identified deities. A considerable number of these are deities not recorded elsewhere in Roman Britain and who it therefore must be assumed to be deities of specific local or regional locations, thus their personification in a few cases and their naming in most others contribute towards the definition of the special character of the visual culture in the region and regional identity here more broadly. This also suggests that a considerable number of the dedicatees, mainly soldiers, needed or felt that they must somehow be in touch with the landscape in which they found themselves by forming a bond with, or by seeking the protection or favour of, the local deities who were symbiotically connected to that landscape. The two most famous of these local deities, one male and one female, will now be discussed in detail in relation to the use of images in their worship before discussion will return to a number of themes relating to the whole pantheon of northern Romano-Celtic deities.

Known only through two inscriptions on altars from Benwell, Northumberland and the head and two limb fragments from the cult statue of the god at his second century AD shrine there is the Romano-Celtic god Antenociticus. Now in the Great North Museum: Hancock in Newcastle, the altars, one dedicated to Antenociticus alone and the other to Antenociticus and the *Numina Augustorum*, both bear some decoration, the latter of these altars, dedicated by Aelius Vibius, a centurion of the Twentieth Legion, being the more visually striking, with a sacrificial knife below a ribboned garland on one side face and a similar garland above a ritual lug on the other. The other altar was dedicated by Tineius Longus, a prefect of cavalry. However, it is the statuary head that is of particular interest (Figures 19 and 20). The god is youthful and clean shaven and wears a torque around his neck. His eyes are diamond-shaped, with thick, projecting lids, and his hair, though relatively short, is dense and thick, combed forward into a

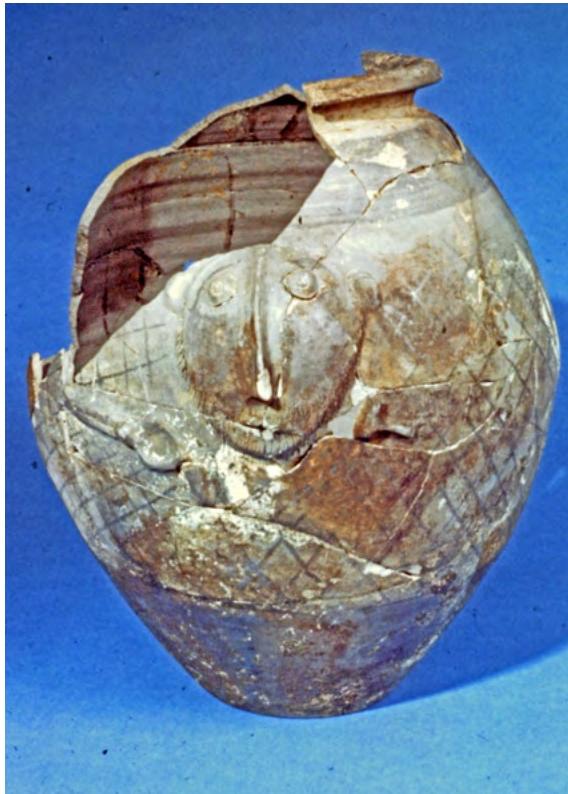


Figure 17 A smith-god greyware pottery vessel from Chester-le-Street, County Durham. Third century AD. Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle. (Photo: Jeremy Evans).

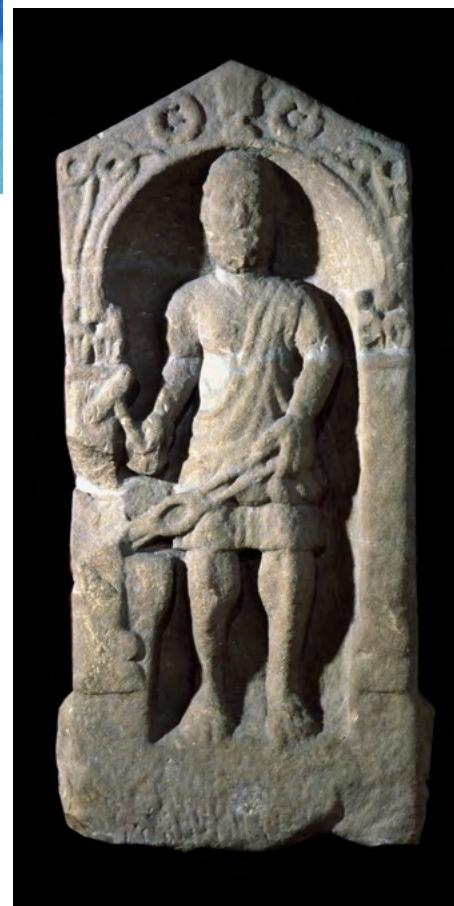


Figure 18 Relief of a smith-god, Vulcan, or a smith from York. Second or third century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).



Figure 19 and 20 Head of statue of Antenociticus from Benwell, Northumberland. Second century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

heavy fringe. The individual locks of hair appear as wide strands, almost like Medusa's hair, and deep drilling between these strands further emphasises this unusual feature.

In 2013 a small statuary head (Figure 21), possibly dating to the second or third century AD, was recovered from a bath house during excavations at Binchester fort, near Bishop Auckland, County Durham. The excavator David Petts believes that the Binchester head has its closest parallel with the head of Antenociticus from Benwell, as just discussed. Certainly, on the Binchester head the styling of the hair into thick strands combed forward towards a fringe high on the the brow is very similar, though nowhere near as deeply-drilled as on the Benwell head. The eyes of the Binchester head are completely different though, being an elongated almond shape, though set in heavy lids. However, having viewed the head myself I wonder if this suggested parallel and the idea that the Binchester head is from a cult statue is correct? The head is very small and from a certain viewing angle to me it appears to resemble contemporary Roman images of black Africans, though such images would appear to have been quite rare, but not unknown, in Roman Britain. Many of the Roman images of black

Africans known are on probably-imported items such as oil flasks and lamps, objects associated with Roman bath house culture. As John Clarke has pointed out, in Italy male black African slaves often served as bath attendants and this was often reflected in the use of imagery, particularly in mosaics, that depicted such men sometimes in an exploitative and sexualised way.

Most of the other Romano-Celtic deities whose names we know from inscriptions on altars were never portrayed as images, and quite a number of representations of unknown or unidentifiable Romano-Celtic deities exist as unlabelled images. This suggests that on the whole worshippers of these deities did not know how to personify them and thus represent them as images, or that for certain Romano-Celtic deities their depiction, their being given bodily form through the creation of their image, was not part of the process of worship of those particular deities. However, two good examples exist of the way in which such local or regional deities could be brought to life through their depiction as an image, by examining images of *Brigantia* and of *Cocidius*.

The name of *Brigantia*, the tutelary goddess of the northern region itself, appears on six or possibly seven altars (from Greetland, Castleford, Slack, and Adel, all in West Yorkshire, Brampton in South Yorkshire, Corbridge and South Shields) but she only appears once as a named image on a relief from Birrens, Scotland (Figure 22). The relief was dedicated to *Brigantia* by Amandus, an *architectus* or military engineer. The goddess stands upright, facing forwards, within a gabled niche. She wears a tunic and a long cloak. On her head is a plumed, horned helmet encircled by a mural crown. She holds a spear in one hand, resting in the crook of her arm and in her other hand holds an object that might be a globe. Partially hidden by the folds of her cloak is a shield that rests on the ground. This is a very different kind of image of a conquered territory from the standard Roman trope of a woman bound or kneeling-*Britannia capta*, *Germania capta* and so on-or a woman being battered into submission as was the case with the sculptural reliefs of Claudius conquering *Britannia* or Nero conquering Armenia from the *Sebasteion* or temple to the cult of the Julio-Claudian emperors at Aphrodisias in modern day Turkey. Here at Birrens *Brigantia* was a proud warrior woman, her image undoubtedly influenced by, and fused with, standard classical depictions of the goddess Minerva.

On the Brampton altar *Brigantia* is named as the Nymph *Brigantia*, suggesting her association in this case with a river or other landscape feature categorised as a watery place. The social range of people dedicating altars to the goddess is interesting: they are Marcus Cocceius, a procurator, Gaius Julius Apolinaris, a legionary centurion, Amandus, an army surveyor, three men with indisputably Roman names, Congennicus, an auxiliary soldier, and a woman with the Celtic name Cingetissa. It might have been thought that under Roman rule the use of the name and creating images of *Brigantia* would have been either forbidden or manipulated to present her in a negative way,

VISIONS OF THE ROMAN NORTH

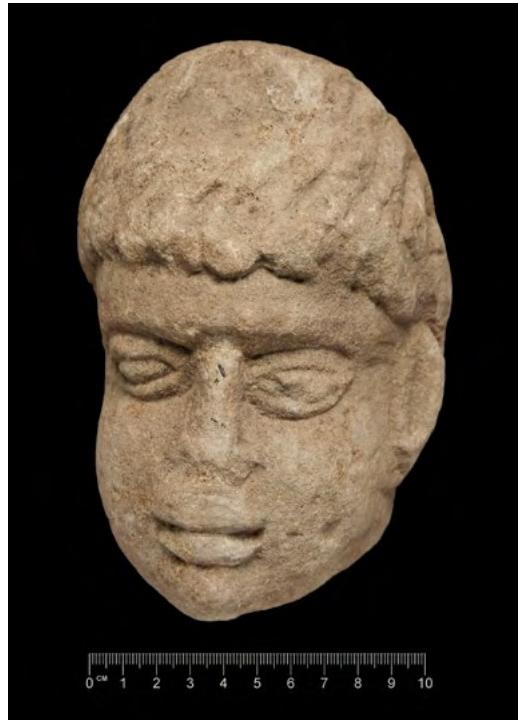


Figure 21 Head of a male Romano-Celtic deity from Binchester, County Durham. Third or fourth century AD. Presently at Durham University. (Photo: David Petts, Durham University).



Figure 22 Statue of Brigantia from Birrens, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. Hadrianic to Antonine. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: David Breeze).

as it has been mentioned was evidently done with the personification of *Britannia*. It can be argued though that it could have been that the syncretised image of her from Birrens testified to her entrapment, if it can be called that, in the partial guise of a Roman goddess. Perhaps this, and indeed the very effrontery of bodying her forth as an image in the first place, was a way of taming her, of Romanising her. Certainly the make-up of her audience of dedicatees suggests that by the second and third centuries AD acknowledgement of her cult among Roman officials and soldiers was perfectly acceptable, and therefore certainly could not have been in any way a subversive act of any kind.

As for Cocidius it has been suggested that he too was paired up or syncretised with Mars, the Roman god of war so obviously popular with the troops of the northern region. The cult appears to have started in the second century AD and over twenty inscriptions to Cocidius are known on altars from northern England, from sites including Birdoswald, Old Wall Carlisle, Stanwix, Lancaster, Housesteads, Bankshead Cumbria, and Eboracum, but none from Scotland. A shrine to a martial deity excavated at Yardhope on the Otterburn military training area may have been a shrine to the god, with the bas-relief of a martial figure carved on to the rock face at the site probably being of the residing deity. Despite the evident popularity of the god his worship largely would seem to have forsaken the creation of images of him. One possible exception is a second or third century AD relief of a martial figure, possibly from Birdoswald or its environs. Though uninscribed, it has been identified with some degree of certainty as being an image of the syncretised Mars Cocidius, given that Birdoswald would appear to have been a focal centre for his cult, with six inscribed altars having been found at the site and in the immediately surrounding area. The head of the figure and his right arm is now missing on the relief. The partially-naked figure stands within a niche facing the viewer. A cloak covers part of his chest and is draped over one arm. On his feet are sandals. He wears a heavy belt around his waist and with his left hand holds the top of a large rectangular shield with a round boss that rests on the ground. The shield is decorated with a fish. It is likely that the god originally held a spear in his right hand and that he would have worn a military-style helmet on his head.

Alongside the presence of the altars to the god at Birdoswald there is other circumstantial evidence to suggest that he be identified as Mars Cocidius. Firstly, the unusual image of a fish decorating his shield suggests that not only was he a martial deity but that he was also associated with northern landscape features such as rivers or possibly with the sea. The inscription on an altar from Eboracum refers to *Cocidius Vernostonus-Cocidius* of the alder-again suggesting that he was also a landscape deity.

A decorated second or third century AD altar from Risingham dedicated to Cocidius and Silvanus together, suggesting, as on the Cocidius Silvanus altar from Housesteads, that the god could also be invoked as a god of the countryside as well, bears a number of images. An image of Cocidius hunting, dressed in a short tunic and with a quiver

of arrows slung over his shoulder, appears on the front, with him holding a bow and standing with his dog on one side of him while on the other side is a stag, depicted at a much smaller scale than either the god or his dog, perhaps suggesting to the viewer that the huntsman is stalking the animal from afar. The scene takes place in a wooded landscape, as represented by stylised trees. On the right side of the altar are carved a doe and young deer and on the left side are the common standard sacrificial items of an axe and knife and a jug and *patera*

Just as a breakdown of the status of those who dedicated altars to *Brigantia* proved of interest so that is also the case with an examination of those who dedicated them to Cocidius, including prefects, tribunes, centurions, a *beneficiarius consularis*, and legionary soldiers. While dedications in the western part of northern Britain were greater in number and were made to him as a martial deity, in the eastern part of the region the evidence tantalisingly suggests that the martial aspect of the god for some reason played a secondary role in the eyes of dedicatees of altars to his aspect as a god of hunting and the countryside. In this context it must be remembered that in one setting *Brigantia* was reimagined as a nymph. Thus it would appear that a number of sophisticated and high-status worshippers of the two deities believed that through personifying both deities as landscape deities it would allow them to propose a way to understand the foreign landscape in which they found themselves.

Two small silver plaques from Bewcastle, now in the Tullie House Museum in Carlisle, are of particular interest in that they are the only objects from the north on which an image of the god appears alongside an inscription on each clearly giving his name. These plaques (one of which is illustrated here as Figure 23) were presumably *ex votos* from another shrine to the god at Bewcastle, and were found in the underground *sacellum* or strongroom in the headquarters building of the fort, along with other material, including a statue base and two bronze *ex voto* letters, sealed beneath fourth century AD debris, again suggesting that the cult here dated to the second or third century AD. It has been suggested that the fort site identified in the Ravenna Cosmography as *Fanocodi* was Bewcastle-*Fanum Cocidi* or shrine of Cocidius. Stylistically the decoration on these plaques is, some might say, simplistic or even crude. On each of the plaques the god appears standing and facing forward in rough outline, on one armed with a spear and shield and on the other holding just a spear with a rounded knob terminal. Perhaps we are seeing represented here the two sides of the god: the warrior with spear and shield and the hunter with just a spear.

An uninscribed second or third century AD dedicatory stone to another local hunter deity comes from Housesteads (Figure 24). This imposing figure, wearing a cap, a tunic and cloak, holds a bow in one hand a bill-hook in the other. He is also armed with a long knife or dagger. Once thought to be a depiction of a military auxiliary archer his eclectic mix of non-standard equipment suggests otherwise.



Figure 23 Silver plaque dedicated to the god Cocidius from Bewcastle, Cumbria. Second or third century AD. Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. (Photo: Copyright Tullie House Museum, Carlisle).

One of the most significant individual finds of the nineteenth century Proud and Hooppell campaign of work at Binchester Roman Fort near Bishop Auckland, County Durham was a large fragment of a decorated dedication slab or votive tablet with an inscription, about three quarters of the stone surviving intact (Figure 25). The main inscription reads [Aesc]culapio [et] saluti [pro salu]te alae Vet[tonum c(ii)uum] (Romanorum) M(arcus) Aureliu[s]....]ocomas me [dicas u(otum) s(oluit)] l(ibens) m(erito), translated as ‘To Aesculapius and Salus for the welfare of the Cavalry Regiment of Vettonians, Roman citizens, Marcus Aurelius [...]ocomas, doctor, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow’. The bearded, balding, toga-clad figure of the healing god Aesculapius, his toga draped over his left shoulder, leaving much of his upper torso exposed and naked, looks out directly at the viewer and stands next to and holds the hand of the heavily-damaged image of his daughter Salus whose head and face, left shoulder and general outline only survive intact. In his left hand the god clutches a wooden spar or staff around which is entwined a serpent, a traditional symbolic attribute of the god. Although his full name does not survive on the dedication slab, there is no doubt that the dedicator of the stone, despite having the Roman forenames Marcus Aurelius, was an ethnic Greek, especially given that most of the doctors serving in the Roman army would likewise almost certainly have been of Greek origin. Luckily this stone was found some time after most of the other inscribed and sculptured stones from Binchester had been disposed of as ballast down a local coal mine, and it now is now part of the collections at the Old Fulling Mill Museum, Durham University.

Curing and Healing

The fact that certain gods and goddesses from both Greco-Roman culture and from the broader Roman pantheon that included what will be called here Romano-Celtic deities could be invoked to undertake curing and healing in the northern region suggests that a split between rational medicine and natural cures did not necessarily exist at this time. In order to demonstrate how images of deities were created as part of the curing or healing process I will consider artworks depicting first of all the Greco-Roman god Aesculapius, and then the Romano-Celtic Coventina and other local or regional deities associated principally with springs and other water sources.

The healing god Aesculapius is quite well represented by finds in the Roman north.



Figure 24 Hunter deity from Housesteads, Northumberland. Late second or early third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

The god, identifiable by reason of the snake-entwined staff he holds in his right hand, appears on a heavily-eroded second or third century AD relief from Chesters, on a contemporary damaged relief together with Minerva, sometimes also a healing deity, at the same site, and along with Telesphorus, Hygeia, and one of the Dioscuri on a similarly-dated relief from Risingham. Given the presence of the Dioscurus it is likely that this now-lost relief fragment, known only today through an eighteenth century drawing, somehow related to Jupiter Dolichenus who along with many other deities was thought to be imbued with healing powers. An altar to the god was dedicated by Publius Viboleius at South Shields some time in the second or third century AD.

The figure of Aesculapius played a prominent role in Roman military religion because of the fondness for the god displayed by two of the most-travelled emperors, Hadrian and Caracalla. That the dedicated relief to Aesculapius from Binchester fort was possibly set up in the commandant's bath house there neatly links the god with water and its role in hygiene and healing.

One of the most significant religious sites with potent artworks from the north and some of whose finds can be considered for inclusion in any catalogue of anatomical or medical *ex votos* from Roman Britain is Coventina's Well at Carrawburgh,



Figure 25 Altar dedicated to Aesculapius and Salus from Binchester, County Durham. Mid to late second century AD. Fulling Mill Museum, Durham University. Illustration from R.E. Hooppell's *Vinovia*. (Photo: Slide archive of the former School of Continuing Studies, Birmingham University).

Northumberland, a second into third century AD healing shrine just to the west of the fort there. Antiquarian discovery and clearance of the well led to the recovery of two significant reliefs, one inscribed, eleven inscribed altars, at least eleven uninscribed altars (actual numbers are uncertain), a stone head of a man, jewellery, including a gold ring and two silver rings, some leather shoes, two highly unusual ceramic incense burners or portable altars, and many potentially votive items, including thousands of coins. A few of the votive items will be discussed further below. Some of this material is now lost, but most is now in the site museum at Chesters fort.

The goddess herself appears on a votive stele (Figure 26), dedicated by the prefect of a cohort of Batavian auxiliary soldiers stationed at Carrawburgh fort, which bears both her name and her image. The long-haired reclining goddess appears in a niche towards the top of the stele. She is largely naked, apart from some drapery wound around her legs, and leans on an overturned water pitcher out of which a symbolic stream of water flows. In her right hand she holds a fern-like water plant of some kind. In other words she is portrayed in the form of a water nymph. Three similar nymph-like female

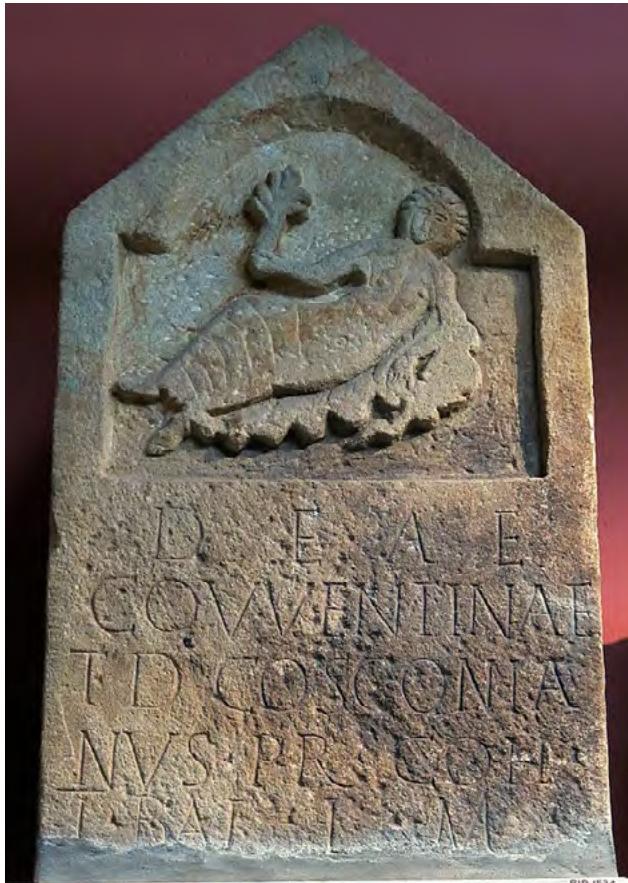


Figure 26 Dedicatory stele or altar to the local goddess Coventina, from Coventina's Well, Carrawburgh, Northumberland. Third century AD. Chesters Site Museum. (Photo: Andrew Curtis).

figures appear together on a second uninscribed relief (Figure 27) recovered from the backfill of the well. All have long flowing hair and their upper bodies are naked. Each wears a thin garment wound around their lower bodies and legs and fastened over their right shoulders. Each reclines on a couch in a niche formed by pillars and arches, suggesting that they are inside a temple building, and each holds a water pitcher in their raised left hand. In their right hands they hold upturned pitchers out of which water pours. This image could represent Coventina depicted in triplicate, it could represent the goddess at the centre of the stone, flanked by two attendant nymphs, or it has been suggested that this particular relief actually came from a shrine to the nymphs and the *genius loci*-the spirit of the place-which lay to the south of the fort, not that great a distance away, and that it was carried from there and dumped in Coventina's Well at the end of the use-life of both shrines.

The pouring of water, the flowing of healing water from a local spring, is used on both these reliefs as a connecting trope, as a way for strangers, in this case the Batavian troops from the nearby fort and others in the civilian *vicus* attached to the fort, to quite literally connect with the local environment, to take these waters and to be at

one with the remote northern region that they have found themselves stationed in or living in. We will see again and again in this study how art was used to establish connections between the natural environment of the north and its people, and how sometimes images of sacro-idyllic landscapes were produced and consumed as ways of coming to terms with the real northern landscape.

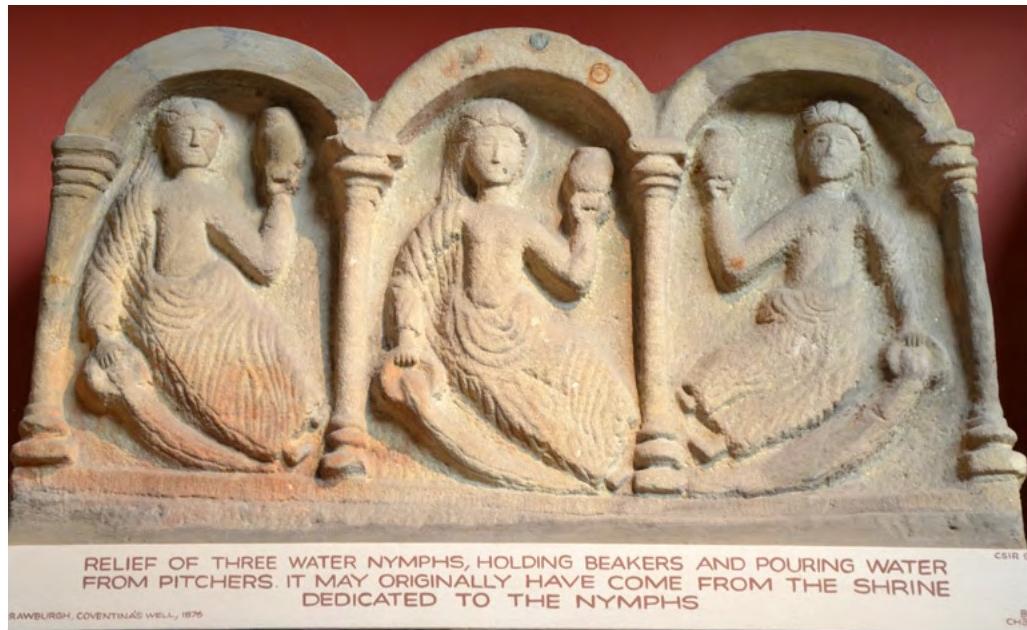
A small bronze figurine of a terrier-like dog from the well might have been an *ex voto* of a pet whose owner dedicated it to the goddess in return for a cure, or its presence might be a reflection of the well-attested link between healing shrines and dogs. A hollow-backed fitting in the form of a horse might again be an *ex voto* image of a sick animal.

No anatomical *ex votos* as such were found at the site but two particular classes of object recovered from the backfill of the well, miniature masks and leather shoes, may have fulfilled a similar intermediary role between the sick and their goddess here. The three small bronze masks from the well again could be of significance, if one accepts the interpretation that in Roman Britain customised anatomical items would appear to have been acceptable dedications as medical *ex votos*, though of the three it is believed that one was probably originally a bucket or cauldron mount, that a second had a similar original function or was a mount for a bowl or item of furniture, and that the third was also originally a mount, though the portrait-like quality of this third mask has previously been commented on by one authority. A number of leather shoes, or rather leather shoe soles, also came from the well, including two shoes which must have belonged to children. Although the discovery of leather shoes in Roman votive deposits elsewhere is not unknown it is equally possible that these shoes might have found their way into Coventina's well simply as general rubbish. However, given the overall make-up of the assemblage from the well it can probably be accepted that they could in fact be medical *ex votos* thrown in as a vow was made, requesting Coventina to cure some malady of the foot.

From the Roman fort at High Rochester comes another well-known sculpture, a relief depicting three women, generally interpreted as being an image of Venus and two attendant Nymphs (Figure 28). One nymph holds a water jug, another holds a garland or piece of textile of some sort. A second water jug lies on the ground, spilling out its contents. A tree locates the figures in a landscape setting at a spring, despite the find-spot being inside the Roman fort, near the headquarters building, where it probably formed part of the decoration of a water storage tank. Dated to the second or third century AD, this relief might again have been commissioned for a healing shrine.

Portrayals of young women carrying pots of water are common in Roman art in general and it is possible that as well as being representations of water nymphs, the High Rochester image could also have been alluding to the Danaids, the fifty daughters of King Danaus who were ordered by their father to marry the fifty sons of his rival twin

VISIONS OF THE ROMAN NORTH



RELIEF OF THREE WATER NYMPHS, HOLDING BEAKERS AND POURING WATER FROM PITCHERS. IT MAY ORIGINALLY HAVE COME FROM THE SHRINE DEDICATED TO THE NYMPHS

RAWBURGH, COVENTINA'S WELL, 1879

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Figure 27 Relief of three water nymphs from Coventina's Well, Carrawburgh, Northumberland. Second or third century AD. Chesters Site Museum. (Photo: Carole Raddato).



Figure 28 Relief of Venus and attendant nymphs from High Rochester, Northumberland. Second or third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

brother King Aegyptus and to kill the sons on their wedding night. All obeyed, except Hypermnestra, and all were punished in the underworld by having to carry heavy, cracked and leaking, jars of water on their heads. To a Roman this was not simply a myth about female transgression: it was part and parcel of their city, in that Augustus' vast Palatine complex in Rome had included a portico of statues of the Danaids bearing pots on their heads, symbolically subjugated here as the emperor used them as signs to represent his achievements in bringing forth order (peace) out of chaos (civil war) and his patriarchal programme for moral regeneration among the women of Rome.

The *Genii Cucullati* and the *Matres*

As has been argued here, the worship and veneration of a number of northern local and regional non-classical deities helped to define the special character of the region in the Roman period, particularly as no attempt at synchronism to classical gods took place with these figures. Another significant religious figure from the Roman north is the hooded male figure known to archaeologists as the *genius cucullatus* or hooded spirit: as they usually occur in groups of three in Romano-British art they are generally called the *genii cucullati*. Images of these three mysterious hooded figures occur on artworks from Housesteads (Figure 29), Vindolanda, Birdoswald, Netherby (two examples), and Carlisle. All follow the same presentation of the spirits as hooded individuals of indeterminate gender.

There would appear to have been a particular significance to triplism—the depiction of particular deities in threes—in Romano-Celtic art, above and beyond the power of the deities depicted in threes. Images of *genii cucullati* in threes also occur in the Cotswold region, with three examples known from Cirencester, Symondshall Hill, and Farnworth, all in Gloucestershire. Another five examples of images of the three *genii* with a fourth figure are also known from the county, along with at least three single hooded figures.

No inscriptions accompany any of the images either in the north or the south-west, so the deities remain nameless to us, and we are uncertain also as to their role in Romano-British religious life and their particular function beyond an obvious evocation of the power of place.

Another group of deities who generally were depicted in threes, and who incidentally would appear also to have been equally revered in northern Roman Britain and the Cotswold region in the south-west of the province, are the *Matres* or Mother Goddesses, though portrayals of a single seated goddess were also relatively common. Sometimes there were very specific variations named in accompanying inscriptions, including the *Matres Campestres* at Benwell, the *Matres Domesticae* at Stanwix, the *Matres Transmarinae* at Risingham, and the *Matres Transmarinae Patriae* at Newcastle. In many cases the goddesses are seated in a row, facing the viewer: they often hold



Figure 29 Relief of the genii cucullati from Housesteads, Northumberland. Second quarter of the third century AD. Housesteads Site Museum. (Photo: Slide archive of the former School of Continuing Studies, Birmingham University).

particular items in their hands or on their laps. For instance, each of one group of identical *Matres* on a second to third century AD relief from an uncertain location near Colinton in Midlothian, Scotland sits in a shell niche and holds a fruit in her hand: two of them also hold a basket, one of these baskets being full of corn ears, while the third figure holds a very large bunch of grapes. A second or third century AD statue of a single *Mater* from Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall is of a seated woman holding a small animal on her lap, perhaps a young goat for sacrifice. A second Housesteads *Mater* of the same date holds a bowl in her lap, and each of three *Matres* on another contemporary Housesteads piece holds a beaker in one hand and fruit in the other. Two more unusual images of *Matres* appear on a second or third century AD altar to the *Genius Loci* and on a relief of the same date, both from Carlisle in Cumbria. On the altar, while seated in the standard manner a single *Mater* appears to be holding a bowl and ladle, or a mortar and pestle, in her lap and what might be a key in her right hand. The three *Matres* on the relief each hold very different objects in their right hands, the goddess on the right holds a plant, the goddess in the centre holds a loaf of bread or a round cake, and the goddess on the left holds either a wool-working distaff or a sacrificial knife. A second or third century AD altar dedicated to the *Matres* at Halton Chesters, despite the inscription, carries only an image of two small Victories holding a wreath, implying in this case a link between the *Matres* and military endeavour, rather than the more usual link with fertility and abundance.

It is likely that the *Matres* were particularly appealing to women and that their symbolic links to fertility, abundance, and plenty were reflected in emotional ties with women trying to conceive, and with those pregnant or giving birth, though as we have seen in the case of the Halton Chesters altar they could also hold an appeal for military men too on occasions.

Belief and Identity

In this chapter discussion has centred on identity and religion as reflected in artworks from the northern region, with the exception of those associated with the so-called eastern mystery cults and with Christianity. The latter two will be discussed in Chapter Four. It has been shown that there was a widespread interest in the production of images of gods of the Roman classical pantheon and of Romano-Celtic deities, some quite obscure and whose worship was solely restricted to parts of the northern region. It is hardly surprising that the communities of soldiers stationed in the region had constant recourse to the need to seek the protection of their gods and that so many individuals needed to create an image of their favoured god as well as to invoke their names through either spoken vow or inscribed dedication. That so many of them favoured Romano-Celtic deities for protection surely need not be surprising. However, images of deities cannot always be accepted at face value as evidence of religious practice alone.

One deity, or more strictly a personification, who features quite high in the list of numbers of deities in the Roman north represented by stone statuary and by decorated altars is Fortuna, daughter of Jupiter, represented by at least 38 items and up to as many as 43 (some items are ambiguous). Examples illustrated here are a third century AD altar to the goddess from the extramural baths at Chesters (Figure 30) and an Antonine relief from the fort bath house at Castlecary, Stirlingshire, Scotland (Figure 31). A smaller number of bronze statuettes of her are also known from the region. Where an image appears Fortuna is either depicted standing or seated in a chair and holding a rudder in one hand, with which to steer the Roman people into the future and a *cornucopia* or horn of plenty in the other with which to provide them with sustenance. A spoked wheel or a globe, representing chance or jeopardy and her power to change a person's luck (with the spin of the wheel), sits on the ground beside her in many of the portrayals. In one instance she appears on a relief from Corbridge seated next to a second goddess who has been identified as possibly being Ceres, the goddess of crops and agricultural bounty. Fortuna also appears quite commonly as an image on Roman coins which would have circulated within the province as a whole. While she could bring or deliver a generalised kind of fortune to individuals, in the context of the Roman military north where service in the army might so easily have led to injury or death her appeal as a figure helping to achieve fortune in war makes a great deal of sense. Indeed, the total number of certain images of her and dedications to her in the north is higher than the totals from the other regions of the province combined. However, I would suggest that there is another possible explanation for the popularity of the goddess and her widespread manifestation as an image here, in that, as has already been noted in Chapter One, she had been a particularly popular deity during the Antonine period and as part of their overt nostalgia for that period and their identification with the Antonine dynasty the Severans too came to particularly revere this goddess, so much so that the emperor Caracalla used her image in particular

as a symbolic shorthand for the presentation of his own ideological programme in his vast public baths complex in Rome. I believe that this symbolic link accounts for the number of instances in which the goddess appears in northern Roman Britain.

It is worth noting that statues of gods need not necessarily have been cult statues associated with temples or shrines or with formal traditions and schemes of worship, even if some religious element can be read into all such works. The gods were thought of as being present in many other places apart from their temples. Analysis of schemes of sculptural decoration in Roman bath houses and bath complexes in Rome, Italy, and across the empire suggests that a visitor to such leisure facilities was as likely to see statues of gods and goddesses and their entourages as they were to see portraits of emperors, local dignitaries, or philosophers, statue figures of athletes of one sort or another, and mythological statue groups. Statues of deities related to water were particularly popular at bath houses: Bacchus and his companions, Venus and Eros, and Aesculapius and Hygeia were the leading pairings. Apollo and the Muses, water gods like Neptune and Triton, and Hercules were popular too, but less common in such contexts. Taken together these figural types reflected ideas about the healing power of water, physical recreation and well-being, and bodily pleasure.

Looking at the *CSIR* volumes covering that part of northern Britain with which this present book is concerned some of these categories of statues are either poorly represented in terms of numbers or are absent altogether from the area. There are no statues of Bacchus known from the region for instance, though images of members of his *thiasos* or group of followers, including his aged companion Silenus, are known, as are images of his female companions the maenads. His male companions the satyrs and the god Pan are represented by a handful of images in the north.

The emperor Caracalla's fondness for, and identification with, Hercules found its most overt expression in the number of representations of the hero god in statuary at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and in the colossal size of a number of them. The cult of Hercules from the late second century AD onwards became especially linked with the imperial family. Presenting an image of Hercules to viewers in public spaces became as much about imperial aggrandisement and glorification as it did about religious affiliations, and we must bear this in mind when reviewing the evident popularity of the god among members of the military in northern Roman Britain.

However, there is no evidence that violent mythological themes, common in Roman art from the Antonine period when the aestheticisation of pain partnered with artistic styles favouring pathos and movement started to become a common pictorial trope in Roman imperial art and in Roman art more widely, found any emotional resonance in Roman Britain. Images of Dirce, wounded Amazons, Marsyas, and Scylla are absent, with images of Achilles only appearing on four intaglios from the region.

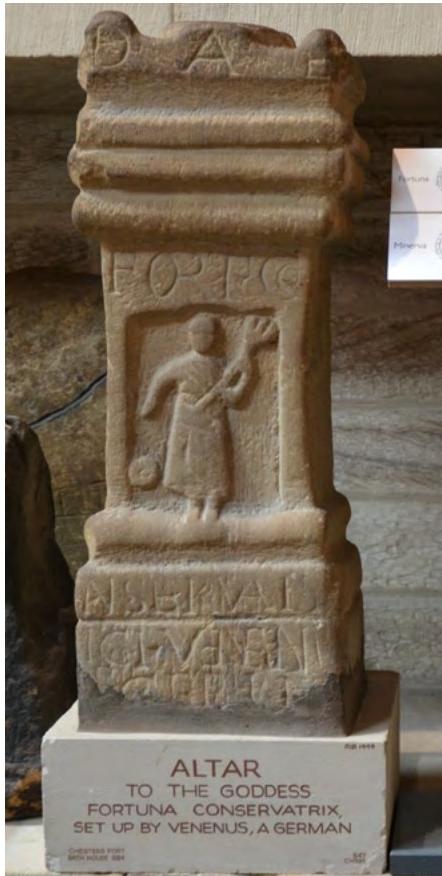


Figure 30 Altar to Fortuna from Chesters, Northumberland.
Third century AD. Chesters Site Museum. (Photo: Carole Raddato).



Figure 31 Relief of Fortuna from Castlecary,
Stirlingshire, Scotland. Antonine. Hunterian Museum,
University of Glasgow. (Photo: Author).

A small number of intaglios from the north display a knowledge and appreciation of more unusual and esoteric deities that otherwise would appear to have been little known in the art of Roman Britain more widely, even in the third and fourth centuries AD mosaic art of the south-west of *Britannia* which often displayed a sophistication in themes which attested to a knowledgeable clientele in sympathy with many aspects of classical learning, particularly mythology. Among these intaglios is a green plasma from the site of the legionary headquarters building in York engraved with a bust of the moon goddess Selene, identifiable with complete certainty by the crescent moon on her head. Martin Henig suggests a first century B.C. date for this gem, making it an heirloom piece brought to Britain, presumably by a senior Roman officer.

The commissioning of images of certain female deities could also have been a way for gendered spaces to be created and protected in the Roman north, as more widely across the Roman world. Indeed, the various female deities most commonly depicted in Roman art were those with whom Roman or Romanised women could most closely associate and identify and the use of their images might therefore sometimes have carried no more significance and meaning than that. Sometimes mortal women chose or were chosen to take on the identity of particular goddesses in certain images, in which cases the significance of this hyper-identification and merging of identities was quite complex. Sometimes images of certain goddesses were used in contexts where their appearance was part of a metaphorical narrative, often created by men. The most popular female deities in the Roman world as a whole were Juno, Minerva, Venus, and Ceres, though only images of the first three of these goddesses were popular in northern Roman Britain.

The contexts in which images of mortal women in the Roman world appeared were necessarily restricted in various ways and the form and carrying media for these images were likewise often limited. However, this was certainly not true in the case of images of pagan gods and goddesses which appeared in temples, shrines, and at other types of religious site, in public buildings and spaces, in gardens, in shrines inside private homes and commercial premises, in military installations, in everyday contexts, and, of course, in funerary contexts. They appeared in the form of cult statues and other forms of statuary in gold, silver, bronze, marble and stone, statuettes, images on major civic and imperial monuments, on reliefs, on altars and all kinds of religious equipment and paraphernalia, on the reverses of some coin issues, on intaglios in finger rings, on cameos and cut gemstones, on other items of jewellery including hairpins, on plaques, in wall paintings, on mosaics, on tile antefixes, on boxes, caskets, and other items of furniture, on gold and silver vessels, on copper or bronze vessels, on miscellaneous metal items, on glassware, on household pots, and many other kinds of everyday items. In other words, there must be hundreds of thousands of items surviving from the Roman world which bear images of their gods and goddesses, and it is not surprising therefore that religious art is heavily represented in the collection of artworks from northern Roman Britain.

Religion and myth at this time created unitary absolutes in which the evident contradictions in the world found illusory resolutions, a kind of harmonious vision which reflected and strengthened the social order. To that end, it would have been considered that a religious space containing statues of deities was a ritual setting in which the deity displayed both saw and was seen.

Chapter Four

Artifice and Transcendence

Eastern Deities

In the previous chapter discussion centred upon the use of imagery in religious practice associated with deities from the Greco-Roman tradition and Romano-Celtic deities accepted into the Roman pantheon. Attention will now be turned towards visual evidence for the worship of certain eastern deities whose cults were particularly entrenched among specific social groups in Roman society and particular concentrations of representations of whom are spread along the line of Hadrian's Wall. In terms of numbers of images there are around seventy sculptures and decorated altars associated with eastern cults, particularly with the cult of Mithras, that is Mithras himself, companions Cautes and Cautopates (together known as the *dadophoroi* or torchbearers), and Sol, having evidently been of particularly significant in the north, as must have been the cult centred on Jupiter Dolichenus and his consort Juno Regina because of its links to imperial authority.

Cybele and her consort Attis are also well-represented among the sculpture. The eastern mother goddess Cybele, also known as *Magna Mater* or the Great Mother, was a deity of particular, though not exclusive, interest to women. A second or third century AD statue of the goddess has been found at Carvoran and is now in Chesters Museum. Though quite badly damaged, the figure of the seated goddess, dressed in a tunic and over-mantle, survives well and it can be discerned from the partial remains of animal claws that there would originally have been lions sitting or lounging in attendance on either side of her throne, a common and standard trope for depicting the goddess. A heavily-worn relief of a similar date from Chesters fort might well also have depicted Cybele, again seated on a throne with attendant lions beside her, watching a prone man, possibly her male consort Attis, being attacked by another lion, but the stone is far too badly damaged to be sure of its interpretation. Attis, in a mourning pose and wearing a cloak and Phrygian cap, appears on one side of a now-partial third century AD altar dedicated to Dea Panthea from Corbridge. He is represented probably as a generic mourning figure on five late second or third century AD uninscribed reliefs from Chester, and in the same role appears twice on the third century AD grave stele of Quintus Cornelius from the city. Though a temple to Cybele is likely to have existed in London, and possibly another at Verulamium, no such centre seems to have existed in the north. However, given that a statue of the goddess was found at Carvoran it may well be of significance that among the items recovered from the site in the early nineteenth century explorations there was a second or third century AD dedicatory stone panel inscribed with a comparatively long poem written by Marcus Caecilius Donatianus, a military tribune there, a man whose roots lay in Roman North Africa,

which makes mention of the names of a number of female fertility mother goddesses including Ceres, Cybele, and Dea Syria and to the more abstract *Pax* and *Virtus*. That a *gallus* or priest of Cybele may have lived and died at Catterick, North Yorkshire is discussed in Chapter Nine.

Single instances of an inscribed dedicatory relief to Arimanus (an extremely obscure deity whose origins lay in Persia), bearing his image, comes from York, a stone dedicatory tablet, but with no image, of Serapis (an Egyptian sun god) also comes from there, and an altar to Astarte (originally a middle eastern goddess of fertility and war) comes from Corbridge. An undecorated altar dedicated to Jupiter Heliopolitanus (with Syrian associations) comes from Carvoran and a gemstone from Housesteads also depicts the god. The unique image of Arimanus from York, the god being named in the now-partial inscription, takes the form of a now-headless winged male figure wearing a short shift-type garment tied at the waist by a knotted snake. He holds two keys in his left hand and it can be surmised that he once held a sceptre in his right. It must be presumed that Arimanus, a Persian deity, is here being conflated with the lion-headed deity Aion, personification of infinite time and a figure often linked with Mithras.

Statuette or figurine representations of eastern deities are not particularly common in Roman Britain as a whole, as revealed in Emma Durham's useful survey, and it is probably therefore not especially surprising that there are only three from northern Britain as far as I am aware at the time of writing: that is a figurine of the Mithraic torch-bearer Cautopates from Newton Kyme in North Yorkshire, possibly Cautes or Cautopates as represented by a head bearing a Phrygian cap from Kirkby Thore in Cumbria, and a figurine of a turban-wearing deity suggested to be Harpocrates from Chester. Harpocrates was originally an Egyptian god who in the Greco-Roman world became associated with silence, secrecy, and hope.

Although a late second century AD dedicatory panel to the eastern sun god Serapis, much favoured by the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla, has been found at York, the temple itself from which it would have come has not yet been located, nor are there any other artworks depicting him from the city. The panel, dedicated by Claudius Hieronymianus, a legate of the Sixth Legion, bears decoration but no image of the god. As was noted in Chapter Two, a bust of Serapis appears alongside busts of Isis and Harpocrates on a cornelian intaglio from Castlesteads in Cumbria, deitic disguises for the emperor Septimius Severus and his sons Geta and Caracalla. The head and bust of a radiate Helioserapis appears on a red jasper intaglio from Vindolanda, while the lyre of the Greco-Thracian Orpheus, along with a sleeping hound, appear on a gem set in an iron ring from Piercebridge, County Durham.

The Hand of God

However, the most significant eastern religious cults in the Roman north were undoubtedly those of Jupiter Dolichenus and Juno Regina, and of Mithras, both of which will now be discussed in turn, not necessarily because of the number of adherents of each cult but rather because of the status, power, and influence of the cult members. In the context of this particular study they are also of particular importance for the evident significance of the use of often stunning visual imagery in cult practices.

The Roman syncretising of the eastern, Syrian god Dolichenus with the most powerful of the Greco-Roman gods, Jupiter Optimus Maximus, indicated the significance placed on the double-named deity by the upper echelons of Roman society. Worship of the god reached its greatest peak under the Severan emperors, which accounts for and explains its relative popularity in northern Roman Britain, especially among the military communities there, but apparently not exclusively so. The god was most usually depicted wearing a cuirass and a Phrygian cap and holding a double axe and a thunderbolt, standing on the back of a bull. He was often depicted alongside his consort Juno Regina who herself stood on the back of a heifer. Other figures associated with the god included the Dioscuri, the heavenly twins Castor and Pollux, and they commonly appeared as images at *Dolichena*, that is shrines or temples to the god.

It has been suggested by Georgia Irby-Massie in her study of military religion in Roman Britain that Jupiter Dolichenus was not only a martial deity but also a patron god of iron-working and iron-workers, and that the occurrences of his image in northern Roman Britain were tied in to the distribution of rich natural deposits of iron ore and to sites where it was processed and worked. This is an attractive idea, very much tying in with the recurring thesis of this present book that art in the northern region in the Roman period was to some extent art that reflected the unique landscapes and natural environment of the region. However, there is no direct evidence that this could have been the case in this instance.

Dolichena would appear to have existed at a number of northern British sites, including Bewcastle, Old Penrith, and Risingham, and possibly at Croy Hill in Scotland, but the most significant cult images have been found at Chesters, Vindolanda, and Corbridge and will be discussed in turn here.

From the Roman fort at Chesters comes a fragmentary statue found in the early nineteenth century depicting a woman standing on the back of an animal (Figure 32). Though the woman is now headless, as indeed is the animal, it has been convincingly suggested to be the goddess Juno Regina, the powerful consort of Jupiter Dolichenus, stood atop a heifer or female cow as befits her gender. Possibly dating to the early third century AD, it is probable that this was one of a pair of statues of the god and goddess, he stood on a bull, her on a heifer, as known from statuary images elsewhere



Figure 32 Torso of a statue of Juno Regina from Chesters, Northumberland. Early third century AD. Chesters Site Museum. (Photo: Carole Raddato).

in the empire and indeed from Croy Hill on the Antonine Wall in Scotland, though the Croy Hill relief is once more badly damaged and fragmentary. The Dolichean bull has been described by Georgia Irby-Massie as symbolically denoting creation, as leading the herd.

The Chesters statue is a particularly good example of a purely classical concept expressed in a highly-competent classical style, but a work carved in local buff sandstone and of an eastern deity. The goddess is clothed in an elaborate set of garments rendered in great detail by the artist, the creases and folds exquisitely represented, there being a sense of a living body present beneath the cloth. Jewellery is also well denoted. What little of the heifer survives suggests that it was anatomically well-rendered too. Had this work been carved in marble it would have been undoubtedly an imported work of art. However, since it was carved from local stone the authors of the catalogue entry in the CSIR volume covering Chesters had to revert to another theory: that the sculptor had to himself have been an incomer to the province, perhaps from the eastern empire, and perhaps someone from there serving as a specialist craftsman in the Roman army. It nevertheless remains a possibility that the artist could have been a Romano-Briton. The Chesters Juno, in all its style and accomplished appearance, also gives a lie to the idea that only poor or mediocre work could be produced from ‘poor quality’ stone sources such as those found in northern Roman Britain.

As an afterword it should be noted that some authorities have suggested that this could actually be an imperial statue, with empress Julia Mamaea appearing here in the guise of

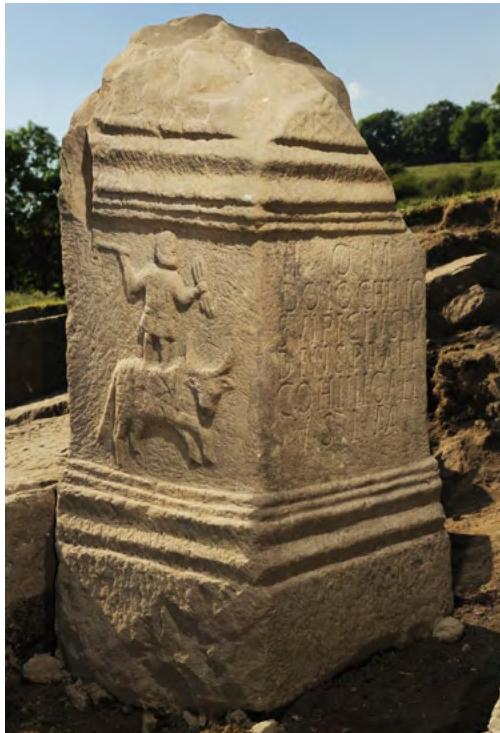


Figure 33 An altar to Jupiter Dolichenus from Vindolanda. Third century AD. Vindolanda Museum. (Photo: the Vindolanda Trust).



Figure 34 Bronze hand of Jupiter Dolichenus from Vindolanda. Third century AD. Vindolanda Museum. (Photo: the Vindolanda Trust).

Juno Regina, given the interest that her husband, the emperor Septimius Severus, had in the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus. It would appear that Jupiter Dolichenus was often worshipped by officers of the Roman army because of the fact that they associated the cult quite specifically with the health and welfare of the reigning emperor and not necessarily for a reason to do with the cult's eastern origins.

Much more recently, in 2009, a small shrine or *Dolichenum* to Jupiter Dolichenus was excavated just inside the fort at Vindolanda, near the north gate. Finds included three altars, one partial and inscribed with a dedication by a Prefect of the Second Cohort of Nervians, a second cruder inscribed example, and a third inscribed and decorated altar recovered almost complete. Dedicated to the god by Sulpicius Pudens, Prefect of the Fourth Cohort Gallorum, on one side the decorated altar bears the standard images of a sacrificial jug and *patera* while the other side face is decorated with a small image of the god on a bull, thunderbolt and axe at the ready (Figure 33). Nearby, in the backfill of the fort ditch, in 2018 was recovered a full-size bronze hand (Figure 34), a kind of *ex voto* object known to have been associated with Jupiter Dolichenus at sites elsewhere in the empire. The hand is a complete sculpture in its own right, and not a fragment from a statue, representing the healing but powerful hand of the deity.



Figure 35 Reliefs, including a depiction of the Dioscuri, from the Dolichenum at Corbridge, Northumberland. Third century AD. Corbridge Site Museum.
(Photo: Studio HB).

Excavations at Corbridge have recovered not only a decorated altar dedicated by C. Julius Apolinaris jointly to Jupiter Dolichenus, Caelestis Brigantia, and Salus but, more significantly, parts of the pedimental decoration of a third century AD temple or *Dolichenum* there, part of a frieze, two relief fragments, and a fragmentary statue of a bull. These sculptures vary considerably in style, from almost classical to plain and naive, and represent the work of a number of different sculptors.

On one side face of the altar is a figure of a *Genius* wearing a mural crown, perhaps representing the fort at Corbridge itself, and carrying a *cornucopia* or horn of plenty in his left hand and using his right hand to pour a libation out of a *patera* onto a burning fire in the top of an altar. On the other face is a figure of a cupid or *putto* holding a *falc* or pruning knife in one hand and a bunch of grapes in the other. Both these images are of figures of prosperity. Two small heads on the front of the altar may be of Sol and Luna.



Figure 36 Detail of the relief depicting the Dioscuri from the Dolichenum at Corbridge, Northumberland. Third century AD. Corbridge Site Museum. (Photo: Slide archive of the former School of Continuing Studies, Birmingham University).

The pedimental decoration of the Corbridge *Dolichenum* consists of two separate small fragments, the first carrying the image of a winged horse's head, a horse that may well originally have been ridden by Sol, below a row of garlands hung between ox skulls. The second fragment again has an ox head and garland on it.

However, the most technically impressive and accomplished of the sculptures from the Corbridge *Dolichenum* is undoubtedly the almost five feet long section of the frieze that has come down to us (Figures 35 and 36). The scene depicted takes place in and around a large classical building with a colonnade and a projecting wing, this building presumably being a temple. A projecting wing on the other side of the building would have appeared on the next part of the frieze which is now missing. A large figure of a youthful, long-haired, naked god standing by a tree on the far right is probably Apollo. Waiting expectantly under the colonnade of the building is one of the Dioscuri, in Phrygian cap and cloak, spear in hand and holding the reigns of his horse. Riding up to the building from the left is Sol, mounted on a winged horse. There is an incredible sense of movement in the figure of the horse and rider here. Sol is youthful and bearded, dressed in a cloak over a tunic and breeches, and on his head wears his radiate crown. His cloak billows out behind him and he grasps and tugs on the horse's forelock to help guide it on its way. It is highly likely that the other, missing part of the frieze would have had at its centre other gods conversing or consorting with Apollo, while the second Dioscurus stood ready with his horse too and the figure of Luna moved in from the right to balance the figure of Sol that we see on the surviving part of the frieze moving in from the left.

The first of the two reliefs was highly fragmentary when found but has been repaired. It can be made out that here is an image of a cloaked and cap-wearing Dioscurus holding a spear in one hand and steadyng his horse with the other. There must originally have been a matching relief of the other Dioscurus in the temple, as they were most usually



Figure 37 Relief of the god Sol from the Dolichenum at Corbridge, Northumberland. Third century AD. Corbridge Site Museum. 3D model made from 34 photographs, using Agisoft Photoscan. (Photo: Deborah Mayers).



Figure 38 Reconstruction of a dedicatory slab to Jupiter Dolichenus, based on two original fragments, from Croy Hill, Dunbartonshire, Scotland. Antonine National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).

portrayed as a pair. The more complete second relief is a frontal radiate head and bust of Sol (Figure 37), whose dense curly locks make him resemble a Medusa and whose nimbus seems a harbinger for Christian symbolism.

The fragmentary statue of the bull, represented now by just part of the body, probably originally acted as the support for a statue figure of Jupiter Dolichenus himself.

The artworks from the Chesters, Vindolanda, and Corbridge *Dolichena* together form a powerful group of insistent and potent images. Their creation and use would seem to have reflected situations where the mysticism inherent in these religious artworks and their curdled beauty intersected somehow magically with the realities of their settings, that is with the geography and history of the northern region.

The heavily-reconstructed Antonine dedicatory stone to Jupiter Dolichenus from Croy Hill, Dunbartonshire, Scotland (Figure 38) again may have been one of a number of artworks here in a shrine to the god associated with military obeisance to imperial preferences.

Mithras, the Bull-Slayer

Some of the most impressive artworks from Roman Britain as a whole are associated with Mithraism and many of these come from the north. The well-known reliefs and statues from the Mithraea at Carrawburgh, Housesteads, and Rudchester, all on Hadrian's Wall, have now been joined by the remarkable 2010 chance discovery of an altar to Mithras and a second to Sol at a Mithraeum at Inveresk, East Lothian in Scotland. Two further Mithraea have been excavated elsewhere in the province, in London and at Segontium fort in Wales.

The artworks recovered from the four northern Mithraea testify to a cult that relied heavily on images, signs, and symbols to help present the complex founding mythology of the cult to its adherents. It was very much a visual religion. The fact that many of these artworks are remarkably similar in style and conception to artworks from Mithraea in Rome, Italy, and around the Roman empire demonstrates the universality of its vision and the regimented nature of its organisation and programme. In many ways, the lack of individuality reflected in many, though not all, of these artworks points to the needs of the cult in subsuming individual identity into a cult identity. While I am discussing the cult in terms of it being what archaeologists call an eastern mystery cult, in a province like *Britannia* it would probably have been accepted as being quite Roman in its origins.

The seven grades of attainment of knowledge and experience in Mithraism were called the Crow or Raven (*corax*), the Bridegroom (*nymphus*), the Soldier (*miles*), the Lion (*leo*), the Persian (*perses*), the Sun-Runner (*heliodromus*), and the Father (*pater*). Symbols relating to each grade and to matching planetary symbols appear on a black



Figure 39 Altar to Sol-Mithras from Carrawburgh, Northumberland. Third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

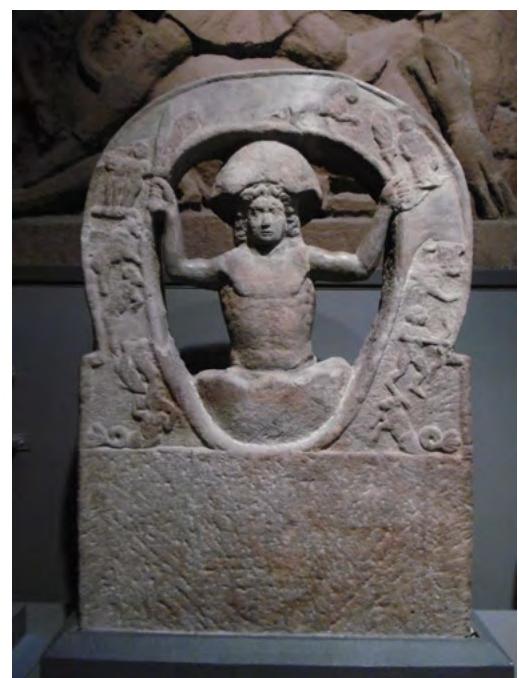


Figure 40 Relief depicting the birth of Mithras from Housesteads, Northumberland. Third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

and white mosaic floor in the Mithraeum of Felicissimus at Ostia, just outside Rome, and from the Mithraeum at Dura Europos in Syria *graffiti* lists of cult members with their grades have been recovered. Initiation rites are pictured in wall paintings from the Mithraeum at Santa Maria Capua Vetere in central Italy.

From the Carrawburgh Mithraeum, built in the third century AD and subsequently refurbished and in use in the fourth century, come statues of Cautes and Cautopates, a relief of Cautopates, a sandstone horn of a bull from a tauroctony or bull-slaying scene, and three altars to Mithras, one of which is illustrated here (Figure 39).

The Mithraeum at Housesteads contained two statues of Cautes and one of Cautopates, a relief of Mithras Saecularis, a relief of the birth of Mithras, a massive relief of the tauroctony or bull-slaying scene, an altar to Sol Mithras, and one to Sol alone. The birth relief (Figure 40) has sustained some damage but is nevertheless largely intact today through heavy restoration. It is an astonishingly powerful piece of work depicting the god seemingly hatching from an egg, though it is also possible that he is simply emerging from within a rock, from within the stone of the sculpture itself. Given that the stone from which the sculpture was carved was local it could be said that he was being born here from the rocks of the north. The lower part of the relief



Figure 41 Relief of the Mithraic tauroctony from Housesteads, Northumberland. Early third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

was probably left bare and unfinished to emphasise this very thing. As he emerges, he holds aloft a flaming torch to represent his bringing of light to the world into which he is being born and in his other hand he holds the dagger with which to kill the bull. Arched around him, framing him, is a curving strip on which are carved the signs of the Zodiac, setting the birth in its wider cosmological context and contrasting the specific time of the god's birth with the limitless span of never-ending time.

This is a work juxtaposing innocence and knowledge, freedom and entrapment, with the main protagonist positioned on the threshold between bringing death and creating life. The relief scene depicting the tauroctony is again quite breathtaking in its boldness of composition, though what we see in the Great North Museum: Hancock in Newcastle today is an incorporation of fragments into a well-reconstructed overall scene (Figure 41). Like all the sculptures from the northern Mithraea it is carved from local stone. The scene comprises at its centre Mithras in his Phrygian cap sinking his dagger into the neck of the stunned and falling bull. The torch-bearers Cautes and Cautopates stand by to each side. A dog jumps up at the bull, smelling its blood. A scorpion and a snake writhe on the ground. Pendant busts of Sol and Luna float in the sky overhead of the scene of ritual killing. Many academics believe that animal sacrifice was central to the proper performance of the rites of the Roman state religion. It is therefore of great interest that some also think that there are parallels to imperial cult practices to be found in the profound centrality of the bull slaying in Mithraic iconography.

Once more, it should be mentioned that there is a strong possibility that all of these Mithraic reliefs and statues were painted: indeed in the old University Museum in Newcastle there used to be a large-scale reconstruction of the Carrawburgh Mithraeum with all the sculpture painted in what at first sight might have seemed to be highly garish colours.

The Rudchester Mithraeum, dating to the third century AD, contained two altars to Mithras and two to Sol, two heads and a limb from statues to the *Dadophoroi*, and a Mithraic statue. The altars to Mithras were dedicated by Publius Aelius Titullus, a prefect and L. Sentius Castus, perhaps a legionary centurion. The Sol altars were dedicated by Apoius Rogatianus and Tiberius Claudius Decimus Cornelius Antonius.

Excavations as recently as 2010 led to the discovery of an altar to Mithras and a second to Sol at a Mithraeum at Inveresk in East Lothian, Scotland. This particular combination of mystic deities need not necessarily cause surprise, especially as under the relentless promotion of Sol by Commodus and the Severans Mithras came to be formally associated with Sol. The altars were found face down in a large pit in what appeared to the excavators to have been a carefully-staged and managed act of disposal at the end of the use of the Mithraeum. The significance of identified acts of structured deposition such as this will be more fully considered below in Chapter



Figure 42 The Sol altar from Inveresk, East Lothian, Scotland. Mid-second century AD. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. Laser scan image. (Photo: AOC Archaeology).



Figure 43 The Seasons relief on the Sol altar from Inveresk, East Lothian, Scotland. Mid-second century AD. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: National Museums of Scotland).

Eight. The name of the dedicator of the altars is uncertain, as his name appears only in an abbreviated form on both altars: he is thought likely though to have been an officer at the fort here. Traces of coloured pigments on the stones indicates that they were at least partially painted, perhaps just in the area of the inscriptions.

Inveresk fort was occupied at the same time as the Antonine Wall, and it formed part of the associated coastal defence system contemporary with the linear frontier. This places the date of the use and disuse of the Mithraeum here firmly in the mid-second century AD, making it the earliest Mithraeum known from Roman Britain, as well as the most northerly.

The altar to Mithras from Inveresk carries a wealth of incidental images, from ravens on the capital of the altar, a torch, a griffin, and a *patera* vessel on one side face, and a lyre and plectrum and a jug on the other. The front face was undecorated, but crucially carried the inscription which translates as ‘to the Unconquered God Mithras, Gaius Cas(sius) Fla(vianus?) (dedicated this altar)’.

The altar to Sol (Figure 42) is more dramatic still in its visual impact. The front shaft of the altar carries a large relief head of the god, a youthful figure with long, flowing locks of hair, his head surrounded by a nimbus. The god’s eyes and mouth are hollowed out. Six elongated slits have been cut through the face of the altar through to the partially-hollowed-out interior. With a light source of some kind placed inside the upper, hollow part of the altar, behind the position of the relief head, light would stream out through the slits, creating the effect of a radiate crown, and through the eyes and mouth. The effect inside a darkened Mithraeum would have been a piece of pure religious theatre. Such visual effects are not without precedent in the north, and similar pierced sun rays and a hollowed-out interior are found on an altar from the Carrawburgh Mithraeum, while the form of the relief of the birth of Mithras from the Housesteads Mithraeum, with its cut-out panels, suggests that it was intended to have been dramatically backlit.

The capital of the Sol altar bears the dedicatory inscription ‘To the Sun..’-and a remarkable panel bearing relief busts of the Four Seasons as female personifications (Figure 43), winter in her hooded cape being particularly striking. All the figures look straight ahead, Spring being at a noticeable distance away from Summer. Spring has a garland in her hair, Summer a floral wreath, and Autumn wears an ivy-leaf garland and bunches of grapes. Both sides of the altar carry wreathes.

As has already been noted, the linking of Mithras with Sol is well attested and easily understood. The linking of Mithras with Apollo in the way that we see at Inveresk can also be paralleled, with both gods having been associated with light. The presence of the Seasons, denoting the passing of time and the inevitability of unstoppable forward momentum, can be tied in to the wider cosmological themes with which Mithraism

was concerned. That the Seasons on the Sol altar are female personifications is particularly interesting, given the possible exclusion of women from the rites of the cult and of its knowledge. No other images of women appear on any of the other items of Mithraic art from northern Britain.

The sheer visuality and sensuality of the Mithraic cult is impressive. It is defined by the design of its highly-idiosyncratic sacred space and equally-unique sacred furnishings, bolstered by complex systems of symbols on display. In concept the Mithraeum was a symbol in itself, referencing the cosmos, a strategy further enhanced by the many astrological and astronomical references in cult artworks. The combination of a low-lit building containing such artworks, costumed cult leaders and adherents, their individual costumes reflecting the particular grade of knowledge achieved by each member, noise or music, and burning incense or herbs, would have produced a heady theatrical mixture of emotions. Lying on couches inside the temple to dine would have engaged the sense of taste too, amid this aural and visual assault. When we try to describe the Mithraic artworks it highlights how complex they are as both images and narratives relating to the Mithraic myth. Given this complexity it seems highly likely that while the overall broad meaning of the works would have been apparent to the lowest level initiates of the cult, the meaning of specific elements and small details would probably have been revealed in a controlled fashion as part of the process of moving up through the various grades of membership before achieving full enlightenment. In other words, the images were layered in a way that controlled the level of understanding of individual viewers, intended in all probability to bring on a state of grace and to channel a kind of mysterious instinctual power. The art at its highest level must have brought on a condition close to dreaming. The secrecy of the cult, its mysteries, served as an integral factor in ensuring social cohesion among its members.

Given that all four of the northern Mithraea were sited outside of, but close to, a fort it can be assumed that cult adherents were either senior military men or senior administrators, and this was most certainly a men-only cult, as further testified by the dedicatory inscriptions on a number of altars here. In Rome and Ostia it would appear that the cult adherents came from a broad cross-section of society, probably much broader than in some of the provinces like *Britannia*. While the changing social composition of worshippers can be mapped in Italy, in the northern military zone it is unlikely that similar changes took place.

The interconnected nature of mythological media in the Mithraic cult across the empire would have provided cult adherents with a degree of certainty and familiarity. Even if there would have been a comfort in the recognisability of cult symbolism inside Mithraea-stepping into the known-the world outside each Mithraeum, whether it was in Scotland, London, or Syria would have added surely to a sense of dislocation, a questioning of the cosmic unity of opposites experienced inside. Even the strong

visual aspects of Mithraic cult associations could not entirely blot out landscape contexts or escape being corrupted by memory.

Recent studies of Mithraism across the Roman world have come to the conclusion that after its peak during the reigns of Commodus and the Severan dynasty the cult fractured into a number of cults of Mithras and then gradually shrivelled from within, until its decline in the north-western provinces in the early fourth century AD, even if decline in popularity did not take place in Italy and the Danubian provinces till the mid-fourth century. We need not look to the rise of Christianity as the reason for this decline. Rather, it would seem that changes in ritual practice and new initiation rites made the cult of Mithras less distinctive and less of a deep emotional experience than it once had been. It could even have reflected a contemporary crisis in masculinity, as identities shimmered and shifted in uncertain times.

It is generally accepted by academics today that the Mithraic cult was more or less an exclusively male cult. Jonathan David has examined the circumstantial and slight evidence for female participation in the cult and has concluded that there is the possibility that a very small number of women might have participated in local sects of the cult, such as the most convincing case of Aelia Arisuth at Guigariche near Tripoli in Libya whose burial along with her husband Aelius Magnus carries inscriptions that claim her to have been a ‘lioness’ and him a ‘lion’.

In generally excluding women from the cult Mithraism may well have served to build in its own obsolescence. Natalie Boymel Kampen has suggested that there are certain contradictions inherent in the portrayal of Mithras as an androgynous, not to say effeminate, youth in some artworks associated with the cult, given that the cult was a particularly and exclusively masculine environment. Her idea that the cult required its members to question the very idea of what makes a man is highly persuasive. The Inveresk altar on which the Seasons appear as female personifications also certainly raises questions about the value and significance of that highly-feminised image in such a male space. She has also noted the unusual fact that the origin story of the initial cultic rite of the sacrifice of a bull that forms perhaps the key image in Mithraic iconography, differs from almost any other kind of religious animal sacrifice in contemporary religions, in that it is the god himself making the sacrifice-slaying the great bull and thus bringing forth new life-rather than a god being the intended recipient of the act and idea of ritual slaughter. The cathartic violence encoded in this episode perhaps conceals the fact that it represents a male subversion of the natural order, and thus might be considered to have been anti-feminine, in that new life is not being born of a woman but rather as the result of violent male power. There would appear to be a great deal of mileage in the development of an analysis of Mithraic religion in these terms. Boymel Kampen has also drawn attention to the possible dichotomy in the god Mithras always appearing in Roman artworks fully dressed in eastern costume, from cloak to leggings and in his distinctive Phrygian cap. Elsewhere

in Roman imperial art when men dressed in such garb appeared they did so as despised eastern barbarians, enemies of Rome, and their clothes acted as distinct signifiers of non-Roman origins and of unsavoury eastern decadence.

In exploring identities in this book it will become apparent to the reader that no particular identity or sets of identities remained fixed in the Roman period, and that even when discussing issues like the projection and display of manliness or hyper-masculinity in the art of the region this discussion has had to take on board the fact that defining these terms is dependent on issues relating to age, class or status, and even sometimes religion. These contradictory or even contested identities relating to the configuration of masculinity are particularly apparent when investigating the workings of the cult of Mithras.

The iconography associated with the cult of Mithras was deliberately complex to create levels of mystery and to promote feelings of both inclusion (for those with full knowledge) and exclusion (for those without knowledge, or on the path to full knowledge). Similar complexity also applied to the imagery used in the worship of Jupiter Dolichenus, significant shrines or temples to whom have been suggested to have existed at a number of northern military sites including Corbridge, Vindolanda, and Chesters, as we have seen above.

Within the Mithraic cult, adherents interacted and created new and often very meaningful forms of identities in addition to those more formally sanctioned by the army, and at the same time created their own social hierarchies. The cult's association spaces were not by any means clandestine, but whatever social hierarchical reordering that took place there tended to remain there, and the social capital accrued or earned there could not be spent in the outside, wider world. The idea of Mithraism as a form of resistance simply does not appear to hold water.

The whole interior of a Mithraeum would have been a fabulous and contradictory performance of repentance and excess, an anxious space, as faith was itself a space of doubt. The artworks there would have highlighted the transience of desire, joy, and loss and served to show that there was really no death, and that if ever there was, it led forward to life. The playing-out of these themes and obsessions to some extent mirrored and prefigured the triumph of Christianity in the Roman world.

Northern Christians

There is little or no firm evidence for overt Christian worship among the peoples of northern Roman Britain before the fourth century AD, even though there must have been some communities of Christians in the north before this time, but it has been suggested that small Christian churches were built at a number of fort sites in the north, including South Shields, Housesteads, Vindolanda, and Birdoswald, though no

specifically-Christian items have been recovered from excavation of these otherwise enigmatic and undated structures. Yet northern Britain would become a cradle of the development of Christianity in Britain in the post-Roman period, and the seeds for this development must surely have been sown in the fourth and fifth centuries AD.

A particularly defining artefact of Romano-British Christianity until relatively recently had always been considered to have been the large lead tanks that were generally thought to have been used as baptismal fonts. Of the twenty four of these recorded up to 2012, some complete and some fragmentary, only one comes from northern Britain, from Ireby in Cumbria. While some of these tanks bear complex figural decoration and Christian symbols the Ireby lead tank, which was found complete and undamaged, was more-modestly decorated with cable banding and repeated circles. While the context of such tanks would appear to have been Christian what they were actually used for has now been questioned.

In 1995 Frances Mawer produced a catalogue of small finds that had at different times been interpreted as being linked to Romano-British Christianity by reason of their decoration. In her study a qualitative judgement was then made of the rationale and reasoning behind the identification of these supposedly Christian items. While one can most definitely argue about her judgement on the veracity of a few individual items in the catalogue, on the whole it provides the most reasoned quantification and analysis of spatial distribution of Christian-linked small finds in Roman Britain that we have. Of those 56 supposedly Christian items from northern Roman Britain catalogued by Mawer a total of 34 items was subsequently discounted by her in her detailed analysis, leaving 11 Christian items and 13 possible Christian items in total from the north. The definitely Christian items were listed as: five silver vessels and a decorated belt buckle or strap-end forming part of the Traprain Law Treasure from Lothian in Scotland; a now-lost silver vessel from the Tyne at Corbridge, Northumberland; a decorated strap-end from Beadlam villa in North Yorkshire; a decorated belt buckle or strap-end from Stanwick, North Yorkshire; an inscribed openwork bone plaque from inside a sarcophagus found at York; and finally a now-lost copper alloy ring from Brough under Stainmore, Cumbria. The Traprain Law and Stanwick belt buckles are of a type generally agreed to be datable to the late fourth century AD.

The silver vessels from Traprain Law consist of: a silver flagon decorated with an upper frieze of four biblical scenes—the Fall of Adam and Eve with the serpent, the Adoration of the Magi, Moses striking the rock to bring forth water, and possibly Moses in the desert, and a lower frieze of a rural scene with sheep and trees and a building of some kind; a silver flagon with an inscription, along with a Chi-Rho and Alpha and Omega; two silver spoons both inscribed with a Chi-Rho in its bowl, one also having a cursive *graffito* on it; and a silver strainer with dolphins on the handle, a Chi-Rho pattern, and most tellingly the name IESUS CHRISTUS below the rim. These five vessels together might have constituted the formal church plate of a rich Christian community or an



Figure 44 Decorated bronze belt-plate and buckle with images of peacocks and a tree-of-life from Stanwick, North Yorkshire. Fourth to fifth century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

individual inside the former Roman province. The square silver gilt belt buckle from the site is decorated with a dotted wave pattern and with the Greek letters alpha and omega-implying the first and the last- in dotted outline: this presumably was an item of military uniform.

The silver bowl from Corbridge, though found at a different time, is likely to have been part of a dispersed hoard of silver vessels of which the most famous is undoubtedly the plate known as the Corbridge *Lanx* which is discussed in detail elsewhere in this book. Antiquarian descriptions of the damaged vessel shortly after its recovery make it plain that a series of six Chi-Rho symbols was engraved around its rim, along with an infilling foliate design, with a flower inside a circle on the centre of the bowl.

The decorated bronze strap-end from Beadlam villa is engraved with a large, naturalistic fish, a potent Christian symbol. The bronze belt buckle or strap-end from Stanwick (Figure 44), now in the British Museum in London, is the only one of a small group of 13 similar decorated buckles that comes from the north of the province. With stylised dolphin heads on the D-shaped loop, the buckle plate's decoration consists of borders of beading and incised lines, between which is a lightly-incised tree bearing berries-a tree of life-flanked by two peacocks, symbolism that is inherently and indisputably Christian.

While the first word inscribed on the bone plaque from York, possibly originally from a decorated casket, is uncertain, it has been suggested that it is SOROR, that is 'sister', in which case the full text of the inscription would read 'SOROR AVE VIVAS IN DEO', that is 'Hail, sister, may you live in God'. The now-lost, probably copper alloy ring from Brough under Stainmore was reported as being inscribed with the Christian Chi-Rho symbol.

If, as seems likely, the Traprain Law, Beadlam, and Stanwick belt fittings represented items of official uniform, then their decoration marks a point at which art became a

unifying signal and where ideas circling around personal identity, religious identity, and political or ideological identity had become almost seamlessly merged.

I have not attempted to track finds from the Roman north with possibly Christian connotations found subsequent to Mawer's catalogue, but I am at least aware of the finding at Binchester fort of a third or fourth century AD ring with an engraved cornelian gem carrying an image of fish hung on an anchor and another example of this type, again a cornelian, from the colonia at York which might fall into this category.

Another strand of evidence for mapping the presence of individual Christians in the late Roman north are the various formulae of words used in inscriptions on gravestones or stelae, and in two cases on sarcophagi, to commemorate the deceased, and which might have helped to reveal a Christian identity to the viewer or reader of such funerary inscriptions. We are on much less stable ground here than even when we were examining decorated small finds for clues to religious affiliations, particularly as most of the verified late Roman tombstones from the north carry no images alongside the sometimes very crudely-cut dedicatory inscriptions. Not only is this ground not stable, it is like shifting sands in terms of the academic debates that centre on the reading of each of these inscriptions, a number of the most important and potentially significant of which come from the late Roman north. However, this should come as no surprise, for as Jeremy Knight has very acutely observed, and as we will see throughout this book, the region was particularly noteworthy in the Roman period for its singularly-strong adoption of the so-called 'epigraphic habit' and indeed for its highly-distinctive, parallel visual culture.

A third or probably fourth century AD stele, without image, from Carvoran in Northumberland, was dedicated to Aurelia Aia from Salona in Dalmatia (in present-day Croatia) by Aurelius Marcus, a soldier and presumably her husband. She died at the age of thirty three and, we are told, had lived a life '*sine ulla macula*', that is 'without any blemish'. This latter phrase has been considered as a particularly Christian formula by some academics who point out that there is considerable evidence for Salona having been an important early Christian centre, while at the same time recognising that the phrase also occurs in undoubtedly pagan contexts as well.

An undecorated child's sarcophagus from York, containing a burial in gypsum, is inscribed on the front with a dedication from Felicius Simplex of the Sixth Legion to his ten months' old daughter Simplicia Florentina, described in a perhaps telling phrase as '*animae innocentissimae*', that is 'a most innocent soul'.

A third phrase or formula that just might have had Christian connotations was '*plus minus*', that is 'more or less' used when referring to age at death, which appears on the fourth century AD tombstone of Flavius Antigonas Papias, a Greek who died in Carlisle

in his sixties, and the similarly-dated tombstone from Brougham, Cumbria of a thirty two year old man whose inscribed name on the stone is unreadable through damage.

The fourth possibly Christian formula of words in a burial context involves the standard Roman funerary inscription phrase '*Dis Manibus*'-'To the shades of the dead'- being combined with '*et memoriae*'-'and to the memory of...'. In the north this occurs on a third century AD tombstone dedicated to Similinia Vera by her husband Flavius Italicus at Catterick and on a fourth century AD stone sarcophagus from York dedicated to Julia Victorina and their son Constantius by the centurion Septimius Lupianus. This particular sarcophagus is further noteworthy by being understatedly, but skilfully, decorated with a winged *putto* holding a torch on either side of the inscribed front panel. Two inscriptions with '*Memoriae*' appearing on its own without *Dis Manibus* come from York, one on the undecorated sarcophagus of Valerius Theodorianus from Nomentum in central Italy and the second on the stele of Bassaeus Julius.

The fifth and final possible Christian inscription formula relates to the use of the words '*Titulum Posuit*'-that is 'set this up'. This phrase appears on: three text panels from Brougham, Cumbria, one to an uncertain dedicatee, one to a woman called Pluma, and the third being the dedication to Tittus M.. already discussed above in relation to the use of '*plus minus*' on the stone as well: a stele from York bearing a banqueting scene and dedicated to Mantinia Maerica and Candida Barita; a stele from Templeborough bearing a depiction of a man holding a scroll, presumably Crotus, son of Vindex, to whom the stone was dedicated; a stele with inscribed text only from Cawfields Milecastle dedicated to the Pannonian Dagvalda; and a stele with inscription only from Old Penrith dedicated to Crotilo Germanus and Greca.

To sum up the overall body of evidence from the north relating to funerary inscriptions involving a word formula with possible Christian connotations is difficult, though a few possible trends are notable. Out of thirteen items, three come from Brougham in Cumbria and four from York, suggesting two possible centres for a Christian community in the north in the later Roman period. York also appears in Mawer's list of sites with an indisputably Christian small find. At York, three of the four finds are sarcophagi, one decorated. Only three of the thirteen items are decorated: the aforementioned York sarcophagus, a stele from York with a banqueting scene, and a stele from Templeborough of a man holding a scroll. Otherwise these objects rely almost exclusively on inscribed text to relay their commemorative message, in one or two cases using poorly-cut letters. In the introductory chapter I made the point that in antiquity there would appear to have been very little distinction between reading and seeing in relation to some inscriptions, for instance when viewing an inscribed but undecorated funerary stele in its original visual setting. Trying to understand that contemporary balance between reading and seeing is crucial. In such a context the colouring of the letters of an inscription with paint, the natural colour of the stone used for the stele, and the materiality of the stele itself would have allowed the viewer

to experience the work as both a memorial and an artwork, if aware of all its cultural connotations and associations. Looking at the situation more broadly, outside of their immediate contexts, we can see that there was a general emphasis on texts in late antique religious contexts which helps situate the northern British stones in a wider world-view and in the mainstream of the epigraphic cultures of Late Antiquity.

The later, more-randomly inscribed series of roughly-hewn early post-Roman northern tombstones such as that of Rianorix from Maryport, Tancorix from Old Carlisle, and Brigomaglos from Vindolanda, for example, should I think be seen as the start of a new, early-medieval series of funerary monuments relying on the presentation of inscribed text only, owing more than a little in their style, substance, and appearance to some of the late Roman quasi-Christian tombstones just discussed above.

Belief and faith as expressed through images in the Roman north have formed the topic of discussion in this chapter and in the previous Chapter Three. At all times I have tried to relate discussion of the use of images to questions of the definition of identity. At times the significance of the military identity of many of those expressing religious sentiments or displaying particular sets of belief has been discussed. In the next chapter I will turn to the examination of military identity quite specifically, in terms of the ways that artistic images were created and deployed to express what was the dominant and predominant identity of the northern region in the Roman period.

Chapter Five

The Good Soldier

It is not surprising, given the heavily-militarised nature of the Roman north, that the majority of sculptures from the region comes from Roman fortresses, forts, and other military establishments. The Roman army was an organisation that to some extent was as much concerned with bureaucratic record-keeping as it was with fighting. It not only *did* things but it also *documented* those things, both through written records and inscriptions, and by the use of images and symbols. This documentation covers the expression of military identity at a number of levels: the army overall, at legion or cohort level, and at the level of the individual. The army's ideological routines, and their public expressions, were also dictated by the imperial authorities and, by extension, by the rites of the state religion, as best exemplified by the *Feriale Duranum* and military calendars like it, as discussed in Chapter Three. Thus, discussion of military artworks as a group will encompass artefacts as diverse as commemorative building records, religious dedications, and tombstones. Together these constitute what Jon Coulston has called the 'monumentalising' of military service. It is interesting to note that though artworks contemporary with the Antonine and Severan dynasties (respectively AD 138–192 and AD 293–324) are particularly well-represented numerically in the assemblage, there is no military sculpture from the northern frontier after the Tetrarchs, that is from the very late third century AD onwards.

Sometimes when Roman soldiers appeared in artworks they were anonymised, there to simply represent the category of 'soldier', but in other instances they were there to represent a specific kind of soldier, a legionary or an auxiliary cavalryman, and in a third category, entirely occurring on tombstones or stelae, the image represented an actual individual soldier, usually named in an accompanying inscription. There is a tendency in some studies of images of Roman soldiers to concentrate on what the soldier is wearing or what weapons he displays, rather than on who he was as an individual, but that approach, though important, will be eschewed here.

Seeing Yourself

One of the most unusual images of soldiers from Roman Britain appears on a small relief stone from Croy Hill, Dunbartonshire on the Antonine Wall in Scotland that depicts three heavily-armed legionaries, though not ready for battle or on guard duty (Figure 45). All three men stand upright, side by side, looking directly out towards the viewer. The central man is larger, older, and bearded, all are bare headed, with the helmets of two of the men being discernible hanging from straps across their bodies. Each holds a spear and a shield, though in slightly different poses. Obviously dating to the Antonine period, it is uncertain whether this particular relief might have originally formed part of a larger artwork, created and sanctioned as an official army



Figure 45 Relief of Roman legionaries from Croy Hill, Dunbartonshire, Scotland. Antonine. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).

commission. Lawrence Keppie, Jon Coulston, and others have suggested that the relief is a privately-commissioned piece, a kind of family portrait, with the three figures possibly being images of a father and his two sons, serving in the military together or possibly representing two generations of a military family shown together in uniform for artistic purposes, but many other interpretations are equally plausible. It is quite likely that the Croy Hill relief was from a grave memorial, with the lower inscribed portion of the stone having been cut off. In any case, group studies of soldiers such as this are uncommon, and parallels are few.

A group study from St-Rémy-de-Provence in Gaul and now in the Gallo-Roman museum at Lyon consists of the depiction of eight legionaries massed together in offensive action, with their shields held up protectively, a work that probably adorned a first century AD mausoleum there. From the military cemetery at Nikopolis, near Alexandria in Egypt and now in the British Museum in London, comes the third century AD tombstone or stele of the soldier Ares, on which images of two virtually-identical men appear. It has been suggested that this represents Ares as both a military officer and as a civilian, though as he died at the age of twenty nine according to the dedicatory inscription this might be unlikely. It is possible that again we are seeing here father and son depicted together.



Figure 46 Painted cast of the tombstone of the *optio* Caecilius Avitus from Chester. Mid to second half of third century AD. Grosvenor Museum, Chester. (Photo: Author).

Individual standing soldiers on gravestones—what are called the *stehende Soldaten* type—come from military cemeteries throughout Roman Britain, with just over thirty of these so far recorded from the province as a whole. In the north a number of these have been found at both Chester and York, and single gravestones of this type are also known from Brougham and Castlesteads in Cumbria, from Carrawburgh and High Rochester forts in Northumberland, and possibly from Scotland. A few examples of these from the Roman north will be discussed here.

The most complete and visually-interesting standing military figures on tombstones found in the region come from Chester and York. An *optio* or non-commissioned officer Caecilius Avitus from the Twentieth Legion is depicted holding a staff in one hand and a despatch box in the other on a mid to late third century AD stele from the military cemetery at the legionary fortress at Chester (Figure 46). The legionary *signifer* or standard bearer Lucius Duccius Rufinus of the Ninth Legion is depicted on a late first century AD gravestone from the fortress at York, carrying his standard which is decorated with *phalerae* along its length (Figure 47). Rufinus wears a neck torc and in his other hand holds a document-carrying case similar to that carried by Caecilius Avitus: the dedicatory inscription on his tombstone tells us that he came from Vienne in Gallia Narbonensis.



Figure 47 Tombstone of the signifer Lucius Duccius Rufinus from York. AD 72-122. Yorkshire, Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk>).

The image of a single bearded man in military uniform holding a spear in one hand and a handled box in the other on a broken slab from Shirva, Dunbartonshire, Scotland dates to the Antonine period and presumably was part of a gravestone. Military memorials to individual soldiers are rare finds from Roman sites in Scotland and the Shirva slab and the Croy Hill relief discussed above are the only two examples so far discovered. An early second century AD monument of an archer standing in a niche from Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall is sometimes considered to be of a specialist auxiliary soldier: however, I believe that this is more likely to be the image of a hunter deity or a woodland deity and will not therefore discuss it further here.

The second type of common Roman military tombstone is known as the *Reitertyp* and, as the German name suggests, is a type of rider or auxiliary cavalry tombstone common in the Rhineland in the first century AD which continued longer in popularity in Roman Britain than it did there, some northern British examples dating to the third century AD. Twenty four examples are known from Roman Britain, sixteen of these from the north, including examples from Corbridge (though now on display in Hexham Abbey), Ribchester (two examples), Kirkham, Lancashire, Lancaster, Kirkby Thore, Cumbria (three examples now in the British Museum, London), Maryport, Stanwix (now in Carlisle), Newcastle, Halton Chesters (now at Chesters), and Chester (four examples). The Rhenish variant-type where an auxiliary cavalryman is accompanied by a servant on foot is so far not represented in the British assemblage.

The northern British examples include cavalrymen riding down a barbarian foe, the barbarian usually lying prone or in a curled-up defensive position on the ground under the horse's hooves. In most cases, bar the exceptional stele from Lancaster discussed in detail below and cavalry gravestones from Kirkby Thore in Cumbria and Chesters on which the cavalryman brandishes a sword and from Hexham on which he holds a standard, the cavalryman generally holds a shield and spear. The first century AD Corbridge/Hexham stele of Flavinus of the *Ala Petriana* is also



Figure 48 Tombstone of Flavinus, an auxiliary cavalryman from Corbridge, Northumberland. Before AD 98. Now in Hexham Abbey. (Photo: Slide archive of the former School of Continuing Studies, Birmingham University).

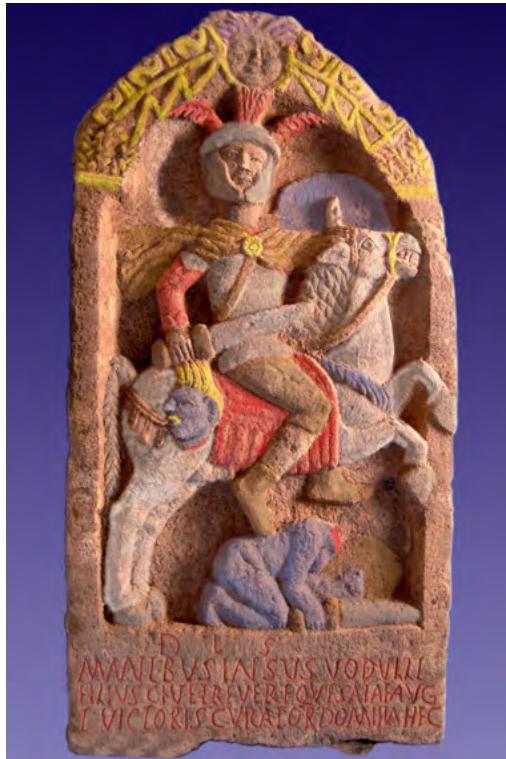


Figure 49 Tombstone of Insus, a Roman auxiliary cavalryman from Lancaster, Lancashire. c. AD 75-120. Lancaster City Museum. Coloured reconstruction drawing by Simon James. (Photo: Simon James).

noteworthy for the fact that it is 2.64m high, that is around eight and a half feet tall, but is unusually narrow at 0.95m or around three feet (Figure 48). It is extraordinarily-detailed in the depiction of the cavalryman and his equipment, but is also notable for the skilled execution of the work. Rather than spearing the barbarian curled up on the ground or attacking him with his sword, which can be seen to be still in its sheath, Flavinus, who holds his standard at an angle as he rides, is simply riding the enemy down and trampling him beneath his horse's hooves. The sense of movement in the work is further emphasised by the fact that rather than compress the figure of the horse within the narrow confines of the short width of the stone the artist has instead composed the image in such a way that the horse appears to be literally breaking out of the niche that frames the image.

An astonishing exception to the standard *Reitertyp* trope found in Roman Britain is the equally tall stele of the auxiliary cavalryman Insus of the *Ala Augusta*, a man of the Treveri as the inscription tells us, that is from Trier in Germany, found as recently as 2005 in Lancaster and dated to probably AD 75-100. We are also told by the inscription

that he was the son of Vodullus, that he was *curator*, possibly quartermaster, in the troop of Victor, which could be a proper name or mean a particular victorious troop of cavalry, and that his commemorative stele was set up by his heir Domitia. The barbarian body under the horse on this stele has been decapitated and Insus holds his sword in one hand and the barbarian's severed head in his other. Red pigment was found in some of the inscribed cut letters of the tombstone inscription and it has been suggested that both inscription and image could have originally been painted, in the manner shown in the artwork produced by Simon James and illustrated here (Figure 49). Painting would have further emphasised the bloody stump of the neck attached to the severed head and the decapitated torso beneath. A sun symbol appears above the horseman's head.

The representation of a decapitated body and the taking of the head as a trophy by a Roman soldier is shocking, but certainly not without parallel in Romano-British art from the north, as on the Bridgeness legionary distance slab discussed elsewhere in this book, and from Roman imperial art in general. A number of instances of head-hunting like this occur in scenes on the helical frieze around Trajan's Column in Rome, for example. Images of riding down an enemy, trampling or stabbing him, or decapitating him made a powerful and provocative statement about the nature and ideology of Roman imperialism.

The existence and study of the *Reitertyp* tombstones as both artefacts and as images and documents throws up a number of highly-complex issues relating to presentation and viewing and those centred around identity. While at face value they can be considered to have been *commemorations* of individual soldiers and their pride in their position in the Roman army, as exemplified by the attention to detail in the representation of Roman military equipment on many of the stelae. Cavalrymen would have been *able to see themselves* in these images and thus identify with them. The dedicatory inscriptions allowed the soldiers to proclaim their ethnic origins and tribal or group affiliations. They were both *Roman* soldiers and *non-Roman* individuals. There was a strange and curious irony in the fact that a recruit whose people would themselves once have been considered by the Roman state to have been barbarians was now employed to act on behalf of Rome to kill other, northern British barbarians. In these artworks we can see the expression of a professional identity and at the same time a strong gender identity (for these rampaging cavalrymen were very hyper-masculine figures delivering death), an ethnic identity, a geographical identity, and an ideological identity. The images were about power and potency, and yet at the same time, and not in a contradictory manner, about home and belonging.

But soldiers could also represent themselves, or be represented by their heirs, in other ways, as was the case with Marcus Aurelius Nepos, a centurion of the Twentieth Legion stationed at Chester. On his tombstone, dated to the first quarter of the third century AD, he appears in uniform holding his *vitis* or centurion's staff in one hand



Figure 50 Tombstone of Marcus Aurelius Nepos, centurion, and his wife from Chester. Early third century AD. Grosvenor Museum, Chester. (Photo: Author).

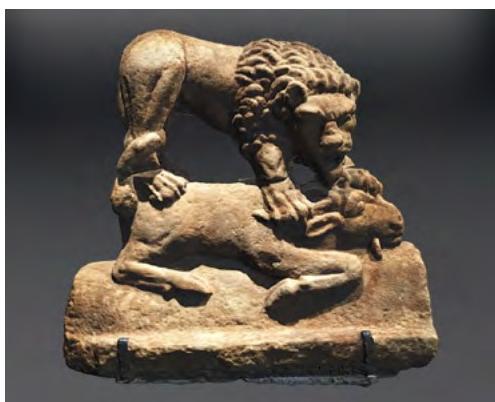


Figure 51 The Corbridge lion. Early third century AD. Corbridge Site Museum. 3D model made from 177 photographs, using Agisoft Photoscan. (Photo: Deborah Mayers).

and a scroll, possibly his will, in the other, in company with his wife (Figure 50).

But to introduce some chronological perspective into the discussion, it should be noted that images of soldiers from the Roman north mostly date to the early and middle Roman periods, with many fewer coming from the later Roman period. There was a general trend across the whole province, not just the north, for the use of inscriptions to decline during the later third century AD, a situation which accelerated going into the fourth century. There are certainly far fewer military building records from the late third century AD onwards in the north. Again, numbers of religious dedications by troops in the northern zone steadily declined over the same period, as did funerary monuments set up for individual soldiers and their family members. No undeniably fourth century AD figural grave memorial comes from the whole of the north, part of a much wider trend discernible across the whole Roman empire. It has been suggested that the only image of a fourth century Roman soldier from northern Britain is that painted on a unique fragmentary parchment ware pottery vessel from the Crambeck kilns near Malton in North Yorkshire and found in York. The painted figure is rather schematic, his body represented as a triangle above the belted waist and another triangle below, suggesting that he is wearing a belted tunic of some sort. He is bare headed. He holds a sword in one hand, his arm upraised, and in the other hand he holds an unidentifiable

handled object with a circular end. The figure could, however, have been intended as a representation of Mars, rather than a soldier.

Other types of military burials, of officers of various ranks, would have taken place in mausolea of different sizes according to rank. Rather than being decorated with martial imagery or portrait images of the deceased, some of these mausolea would have been decorated with classical apotropaic images, such as protective lions and sphinxes. Indeed sculptures of lions probably derived from tombs such as these are relatively common finds from military sites in the Roman north, the two most famous examples of which are the late second to early third century AD Corbridge Lion, later reused as a fountain fitting, and the mid-second to early third century AD Cramond Lioness.

The Corbridge lion is a relatively small sculpture of a lion that is caught in the process of eating its prey, a popular motif, in this case a small stag (Figure 51). However, by far the most impressive sculpture of a ravening feline from Roman Britain is the Cramond Lioness, found in 1997 in the River Almond at Cramond, Edinburgh and now in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh (Figures 52 and 53). Not only is the figure of the beast modelled more accurately and more powerfully than the other examples from the province, but it also differs from the others in terms of its sheer size, composition, meaning, and significance. The white sandstone sculpture, dating to the mid-second century to the early third century AD it is thought, would once have stood proudly atop a stone funerary mausoleum, probably built for a high-ranking officer at the nearby Roman fort at Cramond. How it ended up in the river must remain a mystery, but as we shall see in Chapter Eight the later history of many items of art and material culture from the Roman north is often of as great a significance as their creation and initial consumption.

The lioness lies full length on the ground devouring her prey, in this case not a goat or a stag, as is the most common a trope for a ravening beast in Romano-British art, but rather she is holding down a bound man with her mighty paws and sinking her teeth into his skull. Two snakes slither around on the ground beside her, symbolically representing the underworld and the symbiotic relationships between life and death, birth and decay. Given the rarity of such a scene in the art from the province, it is worth considering the meaning of the image, in terms of what it might tell us about Roman and native Caledonian relationships and interactions. The condemning of a prisoner to a death by wild animal-*damnatio ad bestias*- is well known from Rome and Italy and from Roman North Africa. It is known that the staging of executions involving wild animals could sometimes be literal: on other occasions these executions were staged as mythological enactments, what has been dubbed a kind of 'fatal charade'. Literary accounts of some of these fatal charades simply serve to demonstrate the otherness of this process to modern sensibilities. Images of condemned prisoners being attacked by a lion, a leopard, and ostriches occur on a second century AD mosaic pavement

VISIONS OF THE ROMAN NORTH



Figures 52 and 53 The Cramond Lioness from Cramond, Edinburgh, Scotland. Mid-second to early third century AD.
National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).



from Zliten in Roman Libya. It could well be that as well as the lioness here being an apotropaic or protective presence looking over the burial place of a Roman officer and reinforcing his personal identity it also served as an ideological symbol of Roman imperial power over the land and its people in which the burial took place. Images of bound captives are not that common in Romano-British art in general and it is surely no coincidence that the four examples known-the Cramond captive, a captive on the Bridgeness and legionary distance slabs, and a small bronze possibly from Binchester-all come from the military zone of northern Britain.

The depiction of conquered foes from northern Britain has been explored already in the context of such images being used to bolster the individual and group identities of Roman auxiliary cavalrymen and in the next chapter it will be further discussed in relation to the pictorial ideological narrative of conquest presented on the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs.

What Makes a Man?

In this chapter I am considering the complex suite of identities centred around the Roman army and being a Roman soldier. It goes without saying that such identities were also tied in with the notion of being a man, with ideas about contemporary masculinity being articulated and reflected in many of the artworks discussed here. There were other media in which the state of hyper-masculinity could be celebrated, and I am thinking in particular of imperial portraits on coins. One only has to think of many of the coin portraits of shaven-headed, bull-necked emperors of the third century AD, many of them ex-military men who were to reign for very short times, to see how the presentation of masculinity and power together in an image could be persuasive when pervasive.

The hyper-masculinity inherent in many of the images of Roman soldiers from the northern military zone of Roman Britain can also be found as a theme on some items of Roman military equipment. Hundreds of items of decorated military equipment are known from around the empire and the Roman north of Britain was no exception in terms of demonstrating how important visual culture was to the operation of the Roman army. Cuirasses, helmets, shields, swords, daggers, and sheaths, along with many types of smaller items of military equipment could be decorated with significant and appropriate imagery. In a military context it is hardly surprising to commonly find representations of certain key hyper-masculine figures such as Hercules and Mars, martial figures with whom serving soldiers and their units could identify, on military equipment and in the form of statuary at Roman forts. It should also be borne in mind that sometimes very late second into third century AD images of Hercules, Bacchus, Venus, and Mars will have possibly also been tied in to wider Severan imperial ideological themes, as occurred elsewhere in the empire and in Italy,



Figure 54 Statue of Mars from Balmuildy, Lanarkshire, Scotland. Antonine. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. (Photo: Author).



Figure 55 Relief of Hercules battling the Lernean Hydra from Corbridge, Northumberland. Early third century AD. Corbridge Site Museum. (Photo: Slide archive of the former School of Continuing Studies, Birmingham University).



Figure 56
Dedication slab
with images
of Mars and
Hercules from
High Rochester,
Northumberland.
Antonine. Great
North Museum:
Hancock,
Newcastle.
(Photo: Author).



Figure 57 Statue of armless, local martial deity from Auchendavy, Dunbartonshire, Scotland. Antonine. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow.
(Photo: Author).

metres or roughly 5 feet 8 inches high. A quite similar statue of the god (Figure 54), though of a bearded deity, comes from Balmuildy, East Dunbartonshire on the Antonine Wall in Scotland, though the god wears further items of protective armour in the form of leg greaves, one of which bears an apotropaic head of Medusa as decoration. He also appears accompanying two winged Victories and the figure of Valour on the Brafield legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall discussed more fully in Chapter Six. The hyper-masculine Hercules appears battling the Lernean Hydra on an early third century AD relief from Corbridge (Figure 55), described below, while Mars and Hercules appear together flanking the dedicatory inscription on an Antonine relief from High Rochester (Figure 56). This penchant for dedicating images of martial deities is also probably reflected in the Antonine image of an armless local martial deity clad in armour (Figure 57) from Auchendavy, Dunbartonshire in Scotland.

Mars also occurs as one of the numerous images on a large copper alloy shield-fitting from Northumberland and now in the collections of the British Museum (Figure 58). Found in the River Tyne, near its mouth, in the mid-nineteenth century this item comprises the rectangular central metal plate with raised circular boss from a Roman shield, the body of which would probably have been made of wood and leather with metal fittings. An inscription on the shield reads 'LEG VIII AUG-)IVL MAGNI IVNI DVBITATI' which translates as 'property of Junius Dubitatus of the Eighth Legion', which dates the shield to the Hadrianic period, that is to the first quarter of the second century AD. An eagle appears on the central boss and eight variously-sized panels on the flat plate around the boss carry images of the Four Seasons, each with

perhaps manifested most spectacularly in the decorative schemes at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome.

There is a number of significant sculptures of the war god Mars from northern Britain. From Micklegate Bar in York is a late third to early fourth century AD statue of Mars which was found along with an altar dedicated to the god and two other altars dedicated to the *Matres Domesticae* and *Deus Vetus*. Though not complete and missing part of one arm, nevertheless it confidently can be suggested that the god was originally presented holding a spear in the missing hand to go with the shield he holds in the other. He is fully-clothed in a protective cuirass, wears a crested helmet, and has a scabbard containing a sword strung across his body. The statue is 1.725



Figure 58 Highly-decorated bronze shield plate and boss from the River Tyne near its mouth. Early second century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).



Figure 59 Decorated cavalry sports helmet from Ribchester, Lancashire. Late first to early second century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

their usual identifying attributes, military standards, a strutting bull which was the symbol of the Eighth Legion, and Mars. The war god is depicted naked, apart from a billowing *chlamys* or short cloak draped over his arms and behind his body, and wears his trademark crested helmet. He carries a spear and shield and lunges forward in an aggressive pose. The craftsmanship of the item is highly impressive. The deposition of the shield in the Tyne places it in a group of objects whose disposal in so-called 'watery places' might have had a ritual significance.

As for the hero-god Hercules one of the most powerful, but naively-rendered, images of him can be found on a small portion of a relief panel found in the chapel of the military standards in the headquarters building at Corbridge Roman fort. Dated probably to the early third century AD, it is likely that a sculptural frieze depicting all of his twelve labours was set up here. The surviving panel carries a depiction of Hercules slaying the Lernean Hydra, in the second of his twelve labours, the naked, bulky god shown raising an enormous, and out of proportion, wooden club in his right arm above his head as one of the hydra's tentacles wraps itself around his left arm. He faces towards the viewer. At his side stands a small female figure, probably to be identified as his patron protector Minerva with her standard attributes of a shield and crested helmet. Though we can clearly make out the tentacle, unfortunately the

portion of the relief on which the Hydra itself would have appeared has not been found.

Much of this chapter has been concerned with the idea that art was used in the military zone of northern Britain to express and reveal identities in a highly-complex and sophisticated manner that allowed for individuals to overcome the anonymity that military life thrust upon them. Conversely though, sometimes art objects might have been used in a manner in which concealment and theatricality, rather than revelation, was the driving force. Such would seem to have been the case with military cavalry parade helmets, parts of five of which come from the Roman north. These items are so elaborate that perhaps they can be considered to be bronze sculptures in their own right, as well as being items of military equipment.

The late first to early second century AD helmet with face-mask or visor from Ribchester, Lancashire is now in the British Museum in London (Figure 59). It is decorated quite appropriately with scenes of battle involving a skirmish between Roman cavalry and barbarian footsoldiers. Three helmets of a Flavian date were found during the earlier twentieth century excavations of James Curle at Newstead, Scotland, that is a helmet with full face-mask, a face-mask on its own, and a helmet without a mask. The fifth, virtually-complete helmet with mask comes from Crosby Garrett in Cumbria and was found by metal detecting as recently as 2010 and then subsequently auctioned at Christies in London. The disposal of the three Newstead helmets might itself have been acts of structured deposition, two being found together in a large pit with other military equipment, as seems to have been the case with many objects at the site: the circumstances of the disposal of the Crosby Garrett helmet are less clear.

Helmets such as these were worn by auxiliary cavalrymen during what were known as *hippika gymnasia*, a form of heavily-stylised and almost ritualised parade-ground horsemanship that sought to demonstrate the extraordinary skill and application of the very best riders and their mounts in front of visiting dignitaries and their fellow troops. The historian Arrian in his book *Tactica* of AD 136 described just such an event in thrilling terms. The idea of each helmet and mask set was to completely cover the rider's head and face, with vision being through cut eyeholes. The elaborate hairstyle and eastern cap surmounted by a gryphon of the Crosby Garrett mask and the hairstyle of two of the Newstead ones, demonstrate the incredible attention to detail of the bronze-smiths who made them. One of the Newstead helmets carries further elaborate decoration in the form of a comic chariot race involving a winged Cupid riding in a chariot pulled by two leopards, aided towards the finish by a second Cupid figure.

From an identity point of view one of the most intriguing aspects of the lone Newstead face-mask is that the features of the youthful mask-face appear almost androgynous, if not actually feminine. It has been suggested that this was an Amazon mask and that

in the mock battles as part of the cavalry display at some *hippika gymnasia* events these legendary female warriors were sometimes represented as fierce opponents by male military protagonists. Thus these costumed events involving members of the hyper-masculinised Roman army could occasionally involve curious instances of cross-dressing play acting. This brings to mind the first to second century AD relief of two female gladiators from Halicarnassus, Bodrum, Turkey which is now in the collection of the British Museum in London.

The relief depicts two fighting female gladiators, each armed with a sword and shield and clad in standard gladiatorial costume, the female sex of the two protagonists being made clear both by the depiction of their bared breasts and by the accompanying inscribed labels that tell us that one of these fighters bore the arena name of Amazon and the other was known popularly as Achillia. The phrase *missae sunt* on the stone suggests that the two women, once slaves, were now being honourably released from their gladiatorial duties.

All kinds of layers of meaning can be read into both the Halicarnassus image on its own and the image interpreted anew in the light of the fighters' given stage-names. Female gladiatorial combat might have been expected to appeal to both those Romans for whom the games were culturally embedded in their psyches and of course to the male gaze in particular. While the fact that one of the Halicarnassus female gladiators fought under the name Amazon does not seem in the least bit surprising, the name of her opponent most certainly is. That they must presumably have been acting out the mythological combat between Penthesilea, the Amazon queen, and the Greek hero Achilles again is inspired, but perhaps again relatively unsurprising. The feminising of the name of Achilles to produce her *nom de guerre* Achillia introduced an element of gender confusion, even gender role-reversal, into the drama. Perhaps some frisson of sexual excitement was provided for the benefit of male viewers of their combat by the very fact of both combatants being women, as it may have been for the viewers of the Newstead Amazon cavalryman.

In considering artworks as reflections of contemporary attitudes towards masculinity and ideas centred on its constant definition and redefinition depending on context and time, further mention needs to be made of the figure of the gladiator, another potent symbol of attractive but repellent hyper-masculinity in Roman society. Natalie Boymel Kampen sees the gladiator as having been both a popular figure but at the same time at the very margins of society.

While in northern Britain there was an amphitheatre at Chester and possibly a gladiator training school at York, as suggested by the recent excavation of an unusual cemetery there, there are, however, surprisingly very few artworks depicting gladiators or arena games of any kind from the region. A partial mid-second century AD relief from Chester carries an image of a *retiarius*, holding his telltale trident and



Figure 60 Glass vessel decorated with images of gladiators from Vindolanda. Second to third century AD. Vindolanda Museum. (Photo: the Vindolanda Trust).



Figure 61 Samian sherd with arena scene decoration from Binchester, County Durham. AD 90-110. Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle. (Photo: Author).

as part of an arena entertainment. Arena scenes were relatively common on samian pottery.

An image of a gladiator also appears on the ivory handle of a second to third century AD knife from South Shields, now in the Great North Museum; Hancock in Newcastle (Figure 62). This is one of only three figural clasp knives with ivory handles from Roman Britain. The gladiator himself would appear to be represented as a *putto* or *cupid*, recalling the scene of gladiator cupids in training on the mosaic pavement from Chedworth Roman villa in Gloucestershire. The South Shields gladiator is

net. A highly-unusual, beautiful, and rare painted glass cup from Vindolanda, represented by four conjoining fragments, bears a depiction of four pairs of gladiators in combat training, overseen by the figure of an instructor (Figure 60). This was most probably made in Cologne in the Rhineland. A small fragment from another mid-second to earlier third century AD gladiator cup has been registered under the important national Portable Antiquities Scheme as having come from Holme-St Cuthbert, near Silloth in Cumbria. Figures of gladiators did though occur regularly on certain types of pottery vessels. As an example I would like to illustrate this with sherds from a late first to early second century AD decorated Form 37 South Gaulish samian bowl from the excavations I co-directed at Binchester Roman fort in County Durham. The busy scene (Figure 61) includes two gladiators in combat and an unusual depiction of two people either being tossed over the horns of a rampaging bull or jumping and somersaulting over the bull



Figure 62 Ivory knife handle in the form of a cupid dressed as a gladiator from South Shields.

Second to third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Great North Museum: Hancock. From the collection of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne).



Figure 63 Cornelian intaglio from York, depicting Ajax manhandling Cassandra and seizing the Palladium of Troy. First century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust:

<http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).

either a *secutor* or a *murmillo*, and is shown at rest, holding the upper edge of his large rectangular shield with one hand and with his *gladius* or sword resting along the shield rim. He is dressed in a short loin cloth with a wide belt: much of his upper body is naked, with his right arm protected by a strapped arm-guard. He wears sandals and protective greaves or guards on his legs.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that there are very few ivory objects from Roman Britain as a whole, only around 125 in total, and so those that come from the north are of especial interest, as there are perhaps more in number than might have been expected, around 10% of the national total. At York, the site in the north with the largest concentration, have been found ivory scabbard chapes, a clasp knife handle, bracelets of different kinds, a fan handle, and parasol ribs, some of this material coming from the so-called York African Woman burial. Most of these are undecorated, so will not be discussed further here.

A female deity with a role of particular relevance to men putting their lives in danger, of often putting their lives literally in the hands of the gods and of chance, was Nemesis, daughter of Nyx (Night) and goddess of retribution. It is of no surprise that a possible shrine to the goddess-a *Nemeseum*- occupied a small room behind the arena wall at the legionary amphitheatre at Chester where an inscribed altar to her was found during excavation here. The inscription tells us that the altar was dedicated by Sextius Marcianus, a centurion, ‘in consequence of a vision’. It is ironic that these words reference a visual phenomenon and yet no attempt was made to give life to that vision for the viewer of the altar by presenting it here as an image alongside the epigraphic dedication. The top

of the altar was decorated with bolsters and rosettes. A second altar to the goddess possibly comes from Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall, though the find-spot is disputed. Undecorated, the altar was dedicated by Apollonius, 'the priest', implying a more formal cult to the goddess here. However, an image of the goddess does appear on engraved gemstones from Mumrills, dating to the second century AD, and from Newstead, both in Scotland. On both gems she is winged, resembling Victory, and wears a helmet. The Newstead image is more detailed in its rendering, with the goddess clearly holding an ash branch in her right hand, to symbolise her role as a divine instrument for justice, while on the ground at her feet rests a spoked wheel, which like the wheel of Fortuna, with whom she was sometimes conflated, represents chance and fate.

Images of certain mythological heroic scenes would have had a direct appeal to many individual soldiers, and amongst these can be included scenes on a small number of intaglios or engraved gemstones relating to the Trojan Wars, especially the legendary exploits of the Greek heroes Achilles, Ajax, and Diomedes, and to the figure of Alexander the Great. Achilles in armour appears on four gems from Corbridge, Standish, Hartburn, and Watercrook. The Hartburn intaglio of an orange glass depicts Achilles dragging the corpse of Hector around the walls of Troy behind his chariot, one of the most shocking and harrowing incidents in the story of the war as told in the *Iliad*. The second greatest Greek hero of the Trojan wars Ajax appears on a cornelian intaglio from York (Figure 63). He is depicted in full armour holding the hair of the Trojan seer Cassandra and dragging her away from the altar of Athena in Troy at the time of the sacking of the city by the Greeks. This action angered both the goddess Athena for desecrating her temple and in some versions of the story Ajax's fellow Greek Odysseus who objected to his subsequent rape of her. This scarcely qualifies as a noble or heroic act, though hair-pulling scenes are a relatively common trope in Roman art in very specific contexts where male dominance needed to be visually rendered, and usually involved images of Roman soldiers grabbing the hair of barbarian women. Diomedes, another of the greatest Greek warriors fighting at Troy, is represented by an image on an onyx from Castlesteads, Cumbria. Portrayed in heroic nudity he holds his sword in one hand and the looted Palladium, the wooden cult statue of Pallas Athena to whose safety was linked the fortunes of the city of Troy itself, in the other. The Palladium was said to have subsequently been taken to Rome by Aeneas where its protective power cast a safety-net over the new Troy.

Alexander appears on two cut gems, from Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh and Chesters. Theseus holding the sword of Aegeus appears on a nicolo from Corbridge. Perhaps surprisingly Hercules only appears on two gemstones from the northern region, a sardonyx from Corbridge, on which he appears with his bow and club, and a red jasper from Malton on which the head of the youthful hero god appears with a lion skin draped over his shoulders, not exactly contradicting his popularity as a subject in sculpture but certainly suggesting that a marked presence in one case and virtual

absence in the other might possibly be accounted for in some way in terms of public versus private affiliation to the god.

A possible depiction of a Roman emperor in the guise of Hercules, although the image could equally possibly simply be of Hercules himself, occurs on a piece of very thin, foil-like folded copper alloy sheet, probably an *ex voto*, found in the River Tees at Piercebridge in County Durham. The unusual cache of items deposited in the river here will be discussed more fully below in Chapter Eight. The impressed repoussé image on the sheet is of a man's head in profile. He is clearly wearing a lion skin, as was usually the case with Hercules, and the pose of the figure has been convincingly compared to a coin type issued by Alexander the Great who identified with the hero god. The great interest shown by both the emperors Commodus and later Caracalla in Hercules and the exploits and achievements of Alexander might suggest that the Piercebridge *ex voto* dates to the third century AD. A small silvered copper alloy plaque, one of two found at York dedicated by the scribe Demetrius working in the governor's residence, is inscribed with a dedication 'to Ocean and Tethys', a phrase betraying the presence of a very learned individual here familiar with Alexander's exact words in defining the limits of his expansion of his empire in the east.

A Frontier Mentality

The Roman emperors and the Roman army projected their power through martial imagery, symbolism, and overt propaganda. An emperor like Septimius Severus, for instance, seems himself to have used the calm of war to reflect on the turmoil of the peace that was to follow. Art at times like these became a prophetic mirror for human behaviour and identity, a signifier of being alive rather than just a provocation. Roman military art cannot be described as having been a passing or superficial engagement, exploring as it did the spatial relationships between the figures portrayed and their surroundings. It possessed a formal clarity combined with the employment of highly-distinctive imagery seemingly derived from authentic experience, and was all the more powerful for that. Its form and themes were based upon a combination of imagination, memory, and observation. Art portrayed life on the very edge of what was then the known world, displaying, but not being dominated by, tension. These artworks only really made sense when displayed in the very region in which they were created: this helped to draw out the motivations behind these unresolved and fragmented identities presented to us from the past.

The military now seem to us as if they were keen to experiment, willing to somehow relinquish control, and unafraid to take chances, producing art that defies easy summary but which rewards careful exploration. Interpretation of this art needs to be iterative, with multiple approaches, in the same way that the art can be seen to have eschewed a fear of complexity, for in a hostile region and in hostile times simplicity generated a sense of peace that itself could have led to complacency. In the end this

created splintering and subdivision more than confluence or commingling, and breaking each series of artworks down into its constituent elements allowed viewers to get to grips with each of them, until the character of the overall programme would have begun to emerge. This curious effect of simultaneously unifying and fracturing, pulling together colours and tones, distances, transparencies, and perspectives, meant that on the frontier, at the boundaries, an idea of empire was concocted from various ingredients: contact with new territories; new ways of thinking about place and space; a revival of interest in ways of imagining and dividing the world; and the dissemination or manifestation of these through art. An understanding of place independent of the traditional dichotomy of cosmography (mapping the whole) and chorography (describing independent parts) as an idea depended as much on ideology and culture and the sense of belonging to a place as it did on religion and geography. Frontier art left a mark of continuity *in* and *on* the landscape, making the northern region a borderland rather than an actual boundary.

In many ways the Roman military art of commemoration was a reaction to the kind of pastoral reveries invoked by the viewing of the sacro-idyllic landscapes on gemstones and in other artworks, as discussed in Chapter One. Bowing to the tyranny of frontier life and living too long at the level of ideological consciousness did not, however, stifle creativity and the instinctive life force. Through a reconfiguration of past achievements through the study of the contemporary environment and its different character alongside the medium of Roman artistic practice, an affirmative but very different northern Romano-British art emerged in which these geographies were now radically and precisely historicised in military art. There was, of course, a temporal aspect to this, and each military campaign in these wild northern landscapes must have led to the asking of the crucial question of what constituted *Romanitas* in such a potentially hostile environment, something that might account for the very different ways in which the Roman army used particular symbols, images, and words to commemorate the building of Hadrian's Wall and subsequently of the Antonine Wall. These responses were so remarkably different that it is difficult to believe that only a relatively few years separated these events.

In a situation where frontiers were abandoned, refounded, and then abandoned too, to those involved it must have seemed at times like the end of history. The Antonine Wall distance slabs, a discussion of which dominates the next chapter, display evidence of an impulse towards mapping and ordering information which is part of an overall Roman cultural trope which underpinned the ideology of Roman imperialism. However, they also called attention to the unplanned deaths and disappointments that are usually omitted from maps and monuments, allowing and encouraging viewers to navigate and interpret such spaces for themselves. The spaces between people and things was not then empty: it was packed with alienating mediations that led to discrepant experiences of viewing and understanding.

Chapter Six

Building an Image

It was standard practice for the Roman army to commemorate its building work at forts with simple inscriptions on building stones, centurial stones, or dedication slabs. However, the three legions involved in the construction of the Antonine Wall frontier works around AD 142, the Second, Sixth, and Twentieth legions, for some reason were given leave to commemorate their building work on the frontier in a much more elaborate way, with a serial programme of inscribed, and in some cases decorated, stones known to archaeologists today as the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs. Twenty commemorative legionary distance slabs, mostly complete but a few fragmentary, have been recovered from the frontier so far to date. It is estimated that there were likely to have been sixty slabs in total, making a unique concerted artistic expression of Roman conquest and military might. The construction of no other Roman frontier elsewhere in the empire is known to have been commemorated in this way and the series represents one of the most interesting and intriguing programmes of art linked to a major building project in the whole of Roman Britain. The afterlife of the slabs, following the abandonment of the frontier after around only twenty years, testifies to the potent power of images in the Roman world.

All scholars studying the Antonine Wall and this remarkable series of twenty legionary distance slabs from the frontier owe a huge debt to Lawrence Keppie for his meticulous cataloguing of the slabs and their contexts of discovery and for his numerous insights into their meaning and significance.

I have discussed various aspects of the slabs in a number of my other books and papers: first with regard to the images of barbarians on some of the slabs and the role of such images in a process of Roman self-identification and self-representation; subsequently attention was turned to the unsettling beheading scene on the Bridgeness slab in the broader context of the aestheticisation of pain in Antonine art; consideration has also been given to the significance of the depiction of classical-style buildings and structures on the Column of Marcus Aurelius, Trajan's Column, and on some of the Antonine Wall distance slabs; in the broader context of the links between work and identity in the Roman world I have analysed the Antonine Wall slabs in relation to this theme; and minor mentions have been made of the female figures, including victories, on some of the slabs and of the animal symbols of the different legions. The viewers and viewing of the distance slabs have always been considered in these studies. With David Breeze I have considered the significance of the unusual, perhaps unique, over-emphasis on military endeavour and achievement recorded on the slabs. It might be thought that indeed there is now nothing new to say about the inscriptions and images on the distance slabs until perhaps more are discovered, but this is certainly



Figure 64 The Bridgeness distance stone from the Antonine Wall, Scotland: a colourised digital reconstruction by Lars Hummelshoj. From Bridgeness, West Lothian. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Louisa Campbell).

not the case. Like a complex painting or sketch, the more you look, and the longer and more intensely you look, it seems that the more there is to be seen.

For a number of years there has been an intermittent academic debate about the painting or colouring of sculptures in the Roman period, perhaps most famously personified in the coloured paintings of sections of frieze produced to accompany a book about Trajan's Column in Rome by the Italian archaeologist Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli. An exhibition on the meaning, use, and significance of polychromy in sculpture in antiquity at the Getty Villa at Malibu, Los Angeles in 2008 also considered broader issues relating to attitudes to colour in the past and to the context of use. More recently, Louisa Campbell has been considering the possibility that the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs were painted, and has been using advanced non-destructive scientific techniques such as x-ray fluorescence and spectrometry to directly examine the stones for evidence of traces of ancient pigments, followed up by digital reconstructions of individual distance slabs as they might have appeared when painted. The research found that on the Antonine Wall slabs examined the range of colour pigments used was dominated by reds and yellows: indeed, returning to the idea of these sculptures being locale-specific, some of the reds would appear to have been created from what would have been a locally-available plant dye such as madder, but others derived from the mineral red colour realgar which must have been imported. The use of red paint to represent blood on the Bridgeness distance slab, particularly with regard to the colouring of the decapitated torso and severed head of a barbarian here, would have undoubtedly enhanced the impact of this particular image (Figure 64).

No-one has argued that *all* Roman sculptures were painted, and certainly there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case: however, it certainly needs to be accepted that *some* certainly would have been. In order to allow the reader to appreciate how very different and visually-striking painted sculpture would have been I have also

included images of two reconstructions of painted tombstones, that of Caecilius Avitus from Chester and of the cavalryman Insus from Lancaster as illustrations in this book.

The creation of colourised images of Roman artworks which for many years had been displayed in museums as bare stone or consumed and circulated among academics as black and white photographic images, testimony perhaps to the austere nature of the technology, brings into question the relationship between ancient and modern viewers in a way that proves to be somewhat of a conundrum. While the use of colour on an artwork can allow us to place it in a particular visual category, eventually we will also need to go beyond this to also consider the economic and social values of colour materials in the past.

Power and Potency

In addition to the recording of the names of the legions involved in the establishment of the new frontier, a small number of the distance slabs also bear the only depictions of soldiers on sculpture from Roman Britain not associated with funerary commemoration. However, in all probability there were common motives to some degree between the choice and nature of the portrayal of Roman soldiers on the slabs and on funerary monuments in the province. Most obviously, the scene of a charging cavalryman on the Bridgeness slab is very much in the tradition of the *Reitertyp* figure that was so popular on first and second century AD military tombstones in Britain and in the Rhineland, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Another motive behind the creation of the artistic programme of which the slabs were a part would appear to have been the need for the soldiers to recognise themselves in these depictions and thus to self-identify with the images in some profound way, and in a different way to other non-military viewers. In some cases this was achieved by the detailed depiction of military equipment and accoutrements, as has also been noted in the case of the carved images on some of the military tombstones in northern Roman Britain, but this was not always so. If it is accepted that the Antonine Wall sculptures were not made to promote or facilitate a dialogue but rather to make a number of overt and coded statements about imperial authority and the Roman army, then the language of power here as presented in text and image can be seen as having been deliberately self-referential in style and content.

While most certainly unique as a group, in certain respects the Antonine Wall distance slabs can however be viewed as part of the continuum of the visualisation of Roman imperial rhetoric, and analogous to artworks on any number of individual imperial monuments in Rome and elsewhere in the empire. Their depictions of pious observation, military might, victory, and the subjugation of barbarian peoples are common enough tropes to provide an initial reassurance that their message is an easy one for us to interpret. The scrupulously-detailed inscriptions on the stones

made it clear to the viewer/reader that the emperor's power was incontrovertible and that Antoninus Pius was both the author of this victory and the worthy recipient of the power and prestige thus afforded him. If in hindsight it was now considered that imperial authority under the anti-expansionist Hadrian had become etiolated and enfeebled such martial imagery and the vast monumental edifice it adorned and explained marked a distinct break with the recent past, and in some ways restored the forward momentum and linear progression of the Roman imperial programme. If the sculptural scheme of the *Hadrianeum*-the Temple of Divine Hadrian-in Rome, built by Pius to honour his predecessor, was backwards-looking, then the sculpture on the Antonine Wall could be thought of as pushing towards some kind of different present and a new future.

But the decorated slabs do not constitute a programme for a provincial imperial monument as such, in the way that, for instance, the artworks on the *Tropaeum Traiani* or Trophy of Trajan at Adamklissi in Romania do. One of the most intriguing aspects of the distance slabs is how forcibly in both text and image the Roman army and its soldiers were blatantly celebrated alongside the glorification of the emperor. This was highly unusual and merits consideration.

The involvement of the Second, Sixth, and Twentieth legions in the conquest and annexation of the region and in the construction of the frontier works in Scotland is made abundantly clear in the inscriptions on the slabs and by the appearance of their symbolic emblems in many of the artworks. The army might have felt the need to somehow reassert its primacy as an offensive rather than defensive force, as it had become to all intents and purposes under Hadrian, and to stress its indivisibility from the forward momentum of the overall imperial programme of renewed expansion under Antoninus Pius.

In this context, the meticulous recording by inscription on the slabs of the specific number of paces or feet of building work on the new frontier undertaken by each legionary detachment surely need not cause us surprise, as will be discussed in detail below. While it is very much a site-specific phenomenon it is nevertheless almost directly equivalent to the much-discussed prevalence of scenes of building and labour undertaken by Roman soldiers on the decorated helical frieze on Trajan's Column in Rome. Inscriptions and images are in both cases being used to inform the viewer or reader about the dual nature of the army as an organisation and instrument of imperial power: the army was as much involved in state and empire building as it was in the destruction of Rome's enemies. If any contemporary viewers sought reassurance about the loyalty of the army and its generals this could be found in the contemplation of such benign scenes and the reading of the epigraphic record attesting to the dignity of the army's labour.

If the Antonine Wall distance slabs were indeed then statements about the Roman army, as well as being about Roman imperial power, their intended message was both documentary and didactic, yet at the same time also boldly conceptual. Maybe the series of slabs also comprised a narrative of some kind that related to the living and the dead, constituting a war memorial of sorts. In many cases these artworks would have attempted to appeal directly to other soldiers and their shattering, communal experiences. Memorialisation replaced triumphalism in the best of these works. The evident attention to detail in much Roman military art surely testified to a need to find the human truth in the chaos of war. The literalness of some of these sculptures was their primary strength. While attempts at symbolic themes were not entirely abandoned, solid and often startlingly-accurate portrayals of soldiers performing specific battle duties and equipped exactly as they would have been at the front can be found in the corpus. Literalness when it manifested itself was not the result of artistic impotence or a lack of creative imagination, but rather it was a reflection of a change in ideology, towards the view of the soldier as being a catalyst for reconstruction and social change that started under Trajan. Soldiers would have been able to see and recognise themselves in such works and to take pride in their individual roles and achievements.

Enemies of Rome

Though much can seemingly be learned about the Roman army from examining the images and epigraphic text on the distance slabs, little can be learned about their opponents. The male barbarian being slaughtered, then beheaded, in the continuous narrative scene on one side of the Bridgeness slab and the dejected, bound male captives on the Summerston Farm, Hutcheson Hill, and Hag Knowe slabs are all generic representations of Rome's vanquished foes. While the jarring violence of the Bridgeness beheading is some kind of foretaste of the dehumanising of the barbarian in Roman imperial art from the time of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus onwards



Figure 65 The Bridgeness, West Lothian legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).



Figure 66 Close-up detail of the beheading scene on the The Bridgeness, West Lothian legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).



Figure 67 Close-up detail of the sacrifice scene on the The Bridgeness, West Lothian legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).

and a general trend towards the aestheticisation of pain in Antonine art, such tactics often went hand-in-hand with the use of generic images of barbarians rather than ethnographically-correct depictions of non-Roman peoples, clothing, weapons, and attributes.

The Bridgeness slab, set up at the eastern terminus of the wall, is enormous, being just over nine feet (2.794 metres) long and almost three feet (0.88 metres) wide: far larger than any of the other nineteen slabs so far discovered. It is more highly decorated than any of the other slabs and bears the most complex images to decipher (Figure 65). The two main images on the Bridgeness slab consist of a scene of battle on one side of the slab, juxtaposed with a scene of a religious rite being carried out on the other.

The battle scene is particularly memorable in that it involves a beheading of a barbarian enemy (Figure 66). It could have represented a specific battle in the conquest or the war of conquest in general. It could have represented Roman imperial power and military might in general or specifically the might of the Roman army or of the Second Legion. It could have been intended to mean all of these in combination. The defeated and dejected barbarian was a common trope in Roman imperial art and here could have represented local tribesmen or the north-western barbarian enemies of Rome in general. The religious rite of animal sacrifice portrayed on the other side of the Bridgeness slab contrasted the blood sacrifice of barbarian foes with that of sacrificial animals (Figure 67). It is an image either of a sacrifice made at the start

of the Scottish campaign or made to mark its end. It could also possibly have been a portrayal of the closing rite for the formal dedication of the Antonine frontier itself. Generically, scenes of sacrifice in Roman art could also be used as signifiers of the piety of the emperor. In both the scene of battle and the scene of sacrifice representations of classical buildings appear, stressing both the materiality and superiority of Roman civilisation and once more probably the building prowess of the Roman legions. Pelta decorations, referencing metal fittings on Roman military equipment, flank the central panel bearing the detailed inscription in which the emperor is referenced and praised and the Second Legion records its specific building achievement.

There is even a scene on one of the distance slabs which introduced a gendered aspect to the emasculation of the defeated barbarian men who appeared in the programme of sculptures on the wall. In the context of the slabs' dogmatic assertion of Antoninus Pius's military prowess and deserved victory, it is of interest to analyse the appearance of a female figure in the central scene on the Hutcheson Hill distance slab. At first sight she appears to be the usual personification of Victory, so common in Roman imperial art by now as to seldom elicit comment, crowning a Roman soldier, a standard-bearer, with a laurel wreath held aloft in her right hand. She is wingless though, unlike the victories on the Summerston Farm, Duntocher, and Old Kilpatrick slabs, and holds a *patera* in her other hand. The event takes place inside a classical building or structure, with kneeling, bound barbarian prisoners looking on from aisles or passages on either side. It has been suggested that this woman is not in fact Victory, but rather a personification of *Britannia*, welcoming the extension of the province, or indeed, more tantalisingly, Faustina the Elder, wife of Antoninus Pius, who died in AD 141 to become *Diva Faustina*, the latter identification certainly making most sense in relation to the overt celebration of the emperor's power here and his attested love of his wife.

It would seem that here on the frontier of the empire there was a particular and overriding need for the Romans to come to terms with the idea of the barbarian and to body him forth through images as part of a pictorial narrative whose viewing helped seal and control his destiny. Through the creation of stereotypes of defeated and subservient barbarians the increasingly dangerous world beyond the frontiers of the empire could perhaps be perceived as being controlled and understood.

Viewers

Who might have viewed the distance slabs and how might these viewers have reacted to their individual or group experience of viewing? In some cases we should perhaps be referring to readers rather than viewers, in that on many of the distance slabs epigraphic text was prioritised over images, yet how many of the viewers/readers would have had the requisite degree of literacy to make sense of the inscriptions? It is unlikely that more than a handful of individuals would have viewed the full sequence of the slabs outside of the sculptors' workshop, once they were set in place at widely-



Figure 68 The Ferrydyke (Old Kilpatrick), Dunbartonshire legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. (Photo: Author).

spaced intervals along the length of the Antonine Wall. A viewer therefore might have only ever taken in a single particular slab or just a few of the slabs, each at a different time and in a different location.

The main audience for viewing the distance slabs was, of course, the soldiers of the wall garrison itself, as access to the militarised frontier zone would surely have been restricted or carefully controlled. It would seem that the individual slabs and the sequence of slabs as a whole were intended to reflect back, and reinforce, military identity, of the individual soldier, of a particular legion, and of the broader Roman army. It has already been noted that the Roman army was part of the subject matter of the stones' narrative, a narrative that turned back upon the soldier viewers like a mirror. The dedicatory texts and decoration displayed an acute awareness of time and of physical space, and for contemporary military viewers it would have provided a profound sense of how they moved through time and how it moved through them and the organisation they belonged to, that is the Roman army. The later abandonment of the frontier was an event which would have ruptured this narrative of shared linear time, a cathartic event that will have contributed towards the unusual nature of the fate of the distance slabs at this time, as will be discussed below.

The appearance of representations of classical buildings on the Bridgeness, Hutcheson Hill, and Old Kilpatrick (Figure 68) slabs also would have acted to communicate a sense of belonging to military viewers by setting up a dialogue of difference between Roman and non-Roman cultures, in the same way that this was achieved on both Trajan's



Figure 69 The Summerston Farm, Lanarkshire legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. (Photo: Author).



Figure 70 The Hag Knowe, Dunbartonshire legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. (Photo: Copyright Hunterian, University of Glasgow).

Column and the Column of Marcus Aurelius by the juxtaposition of images of Romanised buildings and ‘rude’ native huts, villages, and other structures.

Yet for any non-Roman viewers the images on some of the slabs would have been particularly and probably deliberately provocative. Scenes of battle and slaughter appeared on the Bridgeness and Summerston Farm (Figure 69) slabs while images of bound barbarian prisoners occurred on three slabs, those from Hag Knowe (Figure 70), Summerston Farm, and Hutcheson Hill. The killing and enslavement of the barbarian enemies of Rome might have appeared glorious and yet at the same time familiar and anodyne in Rome itself but such triumphalist imagery when employed on monuments in conquered territories was altogether more confrontational, as can be assumed to have been the case with the trophy monuments of Augustus at La Turbie and Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, the Augustan and Julio-Claudian arches of Gallia Narbonensis, and on the *Tropaeum Traiani* at Adamklissi.

The Dignity of Labour

The significance of the texts of the inscriptions on the distance slabs referring to work and labour, to physical things achieved, is apparent and it can be argued that the idea of work as an ideological concept was presented here along with the repetitious formula on the slabs as part of a strategy for conceptualising hostile space, demonstrating control of the frontier line, and understanding conquered territory.

The distance slabs are of a number of types, being either plain with an inscription, sparsely decorated and inscribed, moderately-highly decorated and inscribed, or highly-decorated and inscribed, but each bears the same, almost identical and somewhat formulaic inscription, introduced by the names of the emperor ‘Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius’ and the title ‘*patri patriae*’-‘Father of the Country’, a formula followed on most of the slabs. The legion’s name then follows with a record of their building work. The recorded lengths of built wall/frontier works vary. Again and again we see reference to ‘*per pedum.....fecit*’ or ‘*fecit...per pedum*’, that is ‘completed..over a distance of....feet’ (on ten slabs) or the distance is given in ‘*passuum*’ or ‘paces’ (on seven slabs). The Twentieth Legion slab from Eastermains carries measurements in both ‘*passuum*’ and ‘*pedum*’. Another exception in phrasing can be found on the Braidfield Farm Sixth Legion slab and the Old Kilpatrick Sixth Legion slab which introduce the otherwise unique formula ‘*opus valli pedum*’, that is it was specifically ‘the rampart-work’ measurement being presented here. Legionary symbols appear as decoration on many of the slabs and seven of the slabs bear sculptural scenes of different sorts.

Distance slabs set up by the Second Legion which include precise details of lengths of wall built, ditches dug, and so on come from Bridgeness, the largest and most elaborately decorated of all the legionary distance slabs, recording the legion having built ‘4652 paces’ of the Antonine Wall, from Carleith, recording a distance of ‘3271 feet’, Summerston, recording ‘a distance of 3666 $\frac{1}{2}$ paces’, Cawder, recording ‘a distance of 3666 $\frac{1}{2}$ paces’, and Duntocher ‘4140 feet’.

Of those set up by the Sixth Legion a slab from Old Kilpatrick records ‘4141 feet’, another from Castlehill records ‘a distance of 3666 $\frac{1}{2}$ paces’, as does a slab from East Millichen, a slab from Braidfield ‘a distance of 3240 feet’ (Figure 71), and the inscription on a slab from Eastermains refers to ‘...thousand feet’, with the actual number of thousand feet not having been carved on the stone.

Of the slabs set up by the Twentieth Legion two distance slabs from Old Kilpatrick each record the building of ‘4411 feet’, a third from Eastermains records the soldiers building ‘3000 paces (and) 3304 feet’, a slab from Castlehill makes reference to ‘over a distance of 3000 feet’, as do two separate slabs from Huteson Hill, while an unprovenanced slab records a detachment built frontier works ‘over a distance



Figure 71 The Braidfield, Dunbartonshire legionary distance slab from the Antonine Wall, Scotland. Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow. (Photo: Author).

of 3000 paces'. Another unprovenanced Twentieth Legion slab bears an inscription mentioning 'feet' but without the precise number of feet having been inserted in the blank space on the stone. A now-lost slab seen at Ferrydyke, Old Kilpatrick in the late eighteenth century was too worn for an inscription to be discerned, but it may have been another Twentieth Legion slab.

The kind of competition between the legions referenced in the slab inscriptions was probably a reflection of pride in one's own individual unit and not necessarily pride above and beyond being part of a larger organisation, the Roman army.

Thus sixteen of the twenty legionary distance slabs known record precise building lengths, two are curiously incomplete, without the distances inscribed in the blank spaces on the stones, a nineteenth slab, from Arniebog is fragmentary and bears images but does not include the section which would have carried a panel bearing the inscription, and the twentieth, now-lost, slab was too worn for any inscription to be read at the time of its discovery and examination. It has been suggested that the two distance slabs on which the number of feet or paces had not been inscribed either were never used, that they were duplicates surplus to requirements, or that they were set up in position ready to have the lengths of building work added but that this was somehow forgotten. The latter explanation seems completely unlikely, as indeed does another suggestion that they were wasters.

That the idea of work as an ideological concept with value was presented here for viewers is without doubt. Equally certain is the way that the repetitious formula for recording lengths of wall built on the slabs was also part of a strategy for conceptualising the frontier and coming to terms with understanding the newly-conquered territory. Of the sixteen slabs recording lengths of building work the overall inscription has

pre-eminence on eleven of them, while on the other five it might be thought that the presence of accompanying complex images in tandem with the inscriptions on the slabs might have had the effect of relegating the importance of the formulaic inscription or even negating it. Far from it, it would appear.

In a world in which much of the hard labour was expected to be undertaken either by slaves or by animals it is difficult to get to grips with Roman views on the meaning of the concept of work, of work as a manifestation of an idea. A textual source which through repetition stresses the moral value of building things is the emperor Augustus's *Res Gestae*. The three principal sections listing the buildings Augustus either built, completed after having been started by others, or restored demonstrate the Roman drive towards commemoration in posterity through architectural benefaction. That many of these buildings were temples also testified to the religious piety of the first emperor, a virtue that later was to become synonymous with the person of the emperor as a matter of course. Perhaps such a link could account for the mundanity of the recording of 'paces built' on the Bridgeness distance slab which otherwise displays images of Roman might and victory and sombre religious obeisance.

Images of Roman artisans, workers, and other professionals reflected various aspects of personal or group identity as it related to self representation, on pride in professional status as manifested in the creation and deployment of images of work and inscriptions naming jobs and professions. Roman freedmen and women were able to celebrate their lives and work mainly, though not exclusively, through the medium of funerary commemoration, on stelae and funerary altars in particular. This was a phenomenon in particular in Rome but also markedly so in the Roman towns of northern Italy and in Gaul and Germany. Shop signs depicting the product being sold or its production must have been common and at Pompeii we can see that these included signs in the form of paintings on the outside of the shop or workshop premises.

Though the slabs undoubtedly formed a series they were not stylistically consistent. Each pair of slabs was very much site-specific, physically placed on the wall on both sides of the same stretch of the built frontier referred to in the inscription. It would appear that four slabs marked each legionary length, two at each end, one on the south and the other on the north side of the rampart it is suggested by Lawrence Keppie. They marked points in a tamed landscape, the art and inscriptions together providing a way for the Romans and others to conceptualise the frontier as a whole entity and not as a collection of discrete places in a broad untamed landscape.

Conceptualising the Frontier

On the Bridgeness distance slab, the largest and most highly-decorated of all the slabs, a number of messages were being presented to the slab's viewers through both the images employed and through the text of the inscription, assuming a visually-literate,



Figure 72 The Rudge Cup. Second century AD. Alnwick Castle. (Photo: Tullie House Museum, Carlisle).



Figure 73 The Amiens Patera. Second century AD. Musée de Picardie, Amiens, France. (Photo: David Breeze).



Figure 74 The Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan. Hadrianic. Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. (Photo: David Breeze).

Latin-reading viewer was involved. Of the twenty known slabs the Bridgeness stone is unique in another way, in that it would appear to have been intended to mark the eastern terminus of the Antonine Wall and thus might be thought to have been subject to a different ideological programme and purpose. Again, even if the images on the slab are images associated with the universality of the Roman conquest here and the building of the frontier, the inscription is again legion specific. Thus, even on the largest and most ideologically-complex distance slab where universal Roman imperial tropes about power, piety, imperial achievement, and Roman cultural hegemony might have been thought to take preference, the site-specific building of ‘4652 paces’ of frontier wall was prominently announced as a conceptual prompt.

There would also seem to have been some element of geographical and spatial conceptualisation involved in the design of two of the three so-called enamelled copper alloy souvenir ‘pans’ or small bowls linked to Hadrian’s Wall. These vessels, the Rudge Cup (Figure 72), the Amiens Patera (Figure 73), and the Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan (Figure 74) are generally considered either to have been ‘the first souvenirs’ of the frontier taken home by soldiers stationed there or by civilian visitors to the wall, or to have been religious or votive items. All of these ‘pans’ bear names of forts along the western part of Hadrian’s Wall from Bowness on Solway to Great Chesters, their incision or scratching on the Ilam Pan being secondary to the vessel’s manufacture: it must therefore be seen as a personalised item. Noteworthy though is an additional inscribed reference

to *VALI AELI-vallum aelium* or Hadrian's Wall-and to *DRACONIS*, presumably Draco, its commissioner and owner. However, on both the Rudge Cup and the Amiens *Patera* the letters forming the names of the forts are raised and therefore had been cast as an integral part of the vessel. On the Amiens *Patera* six forts on Hadrian's Wall are named in red enamel (Bowness-on-Solway, Burgh-by-Sands, Stanwix, Castlesteads, Birdoswald, and Great Chesters), each name on a simple diagrammatic representation of the fort as a square of coloured enamelling. Most interestingly the frontier is represented below by a red crenellated line for the wall itself and for distance towers. A similar crenellated line can be seen on the Rudge Cup where five forts are named, the same as on the Amiens *Patera*, with the omission of Great Chesters.

Thus the two cups used a small number of inscribed place-names to prompt the viewer to link up these site-specific individual fort names and the schematic depiction of forts and the crenellated wall, and to thus conceptualise the whole frontier and its material enormity from otherwise-fragmentary information. It is possible that there could have been some additional element of cosmological significance to the circularity of the design on the bowls, a specifically-chosen field for images because of its link to metaphors for the passage of time. Whether or not this was the case, each of the 'pans' undoubtedly represented a map to be held in the hand and viewed for whatever purpose.

These examples of precise quantification of distance on the Antonine Wall slabs and sequential naming of places on the enamelled cups would appear to have been deliberate and significant in both cases. Being able to measure distance, to quantify the distance between one point and another, one place from another, particularly in a wild frontier zone, was crucial for the Roman army. The deployment of military surveyors reflected the need to record precisely in order to facilitate the creation of the frontier and an infrastructure to support it. Once the nature of space and distance could be measured it could then be understood and conquered.

Much Roman art in the north would seem to have been preoccupied with movement through landscape, a marrying of distance and time, situating recording and commemoration in the very landscape setting in which movements took place. Art and setting were here one and the same. Knowledge of local materials, of local stone outcrops, was gained by walking and traversing the land to try to understand its natural properties and essence, turning Nature into culture. The art was conceptual and theoretical, sometimes didactic, and sometimes ideological.

Thus the Antonine Wall distance slabs would seem to have been part of a conscious effort to commemorate chosen places physically in some way, though they were not evidently chosen at random, but rather with a view to being suitable for memorable commemoration. Nevertheless, it merged ideas about landscape, understanding, time, movement, and distance in a way that married the commemoration of specific

historical interactions with landscape. The Roman legionary soldiers who conquered the territory that was to become the line of the Antonine frontier understood the natural characteristics of the land by moving across it, engaged in fighting there or in reconnaissance missions, surveying the line of the frontier and setting it out, and in building the frontier works. The local natural materials, soil, turf, timber, and stone were utilised to build the wall, ramparts and forts: the very materiality of the frontier reflected its setting and its imposition on and disruption of natural space and traditional routes. The need to then fully and meticulously document and commemorate the creation of the frontier through a serial programme of sculptural and epigraphic works in the form of the legionary distance slabs was an unprecedented and unusual decision. The elegance and effectiveness of this strategy is clear: it was a tussle between the urge to reveal and the instinct to suppress. So deep was the shading of motive and consequence that it brought a sense of resolution, a feeling of closure.

In the case of the Antonine Wall distance slabs and the Hadrian's Wall cups there is an element of the celebration of itineraries between fixed points, creating links, creating certainties and reassurance, defining spaces and boundaries within which ideologies could and did flourish.

While Roman military building record stones are quite common in Roman Britain and throughout the empire, nothing strictly comparable to the Antonine Wall distance slabs is known. Most standard building records comprise an otherwise undecorated stone bearing a central inscription stating that such and such a legion or such and such a cohort or auxiliary unit built this. The need to provide any kind of precise quantification of just what was built is generally absent. The Antonine Wall distance slabs record physical exertion on a precise scale whose end result was reflected in the completion of the frontier works. Other less specific references to the built environment on the Antonine Wall occur in the form of depictions of Roman-style buildings on three of the distance slabs, from Bridgeness, Huteson Hill, and Old Kilpatrick.

In a Roman military context we can only find a parallel to the lauding of Roman military building work, and then only in images rather than text, on the decorated helical frieze depicting the Dacian Wars of AD 101-102 and 105-106 around Trajan's Column in Rome, built to honour the emperor after his death and to house his ashes. The number of scenes in which Trajan's troops chop down trees for building timber, build bridges, dig defensive ditches, cut turf to throw up ramparts, and build camps and fortifications is marked. Such scenes have been considered to act in contrast to those scenes involving light skirmishes with the enemy, full-pitched battles, and extended sieges of Dacian fortifications. In other words the juxtaposition of scenes of construction with those of destruction is a fully-formed part of the narrative political and ideological programme of the monument, just as it is argued that the precision

quantification of military building works acts in a similar role on the Antonine Wall series of legionary distance slabs.

Certain aspects of the decorative programme on the distance slabs and certain parts of the texts of the inscriptions stressed, indeed almost overstressed, the victory and successes of the emperor Antoninus Pius, the celebration of the army as a unit, of individual legions, and finally of the individual legionary soldiers. It was as if the soldiers perhaps felt a need to see themselves reflected in these artworks.

Afterlife

The great political and probably religious significance of the Antonine Wall distance slabs is surely confirmed by the methodical nature of their disposal at the time of the decommissioning of the Antonine frontier in Scotland in the AD 160s. In those instances where it has been possible to verify the archaeological context of their discovery, it would appear that the inscribed and decorated legionary distance slabs which had formed a commemorative series set in the wall structure were taken down and individually buried in large pits away from the slighted defence system.

If the wall and the slabs had been dedicated at a religious ceremony to mark its inauguration then they might have been thought to have been imbued with some form of religious currency, indeed to be almost like temple *ex votos* in some respects. The depiction of a sacrifice caught in stasis on the Bridgeness slab might also have given this particular slab a further sacred cachet. Equally, the slabs also represented Roman imperial authority and power, as indicated by the fact that they all carried the inscribed name of the emperor, and overtly attested to the power of the Roman army. As has been argued above, they would also seem to have very much represented and reflected the Roman army's own identity and the sense of self and the worth of individual legions and soldiers.

At Roman religious sites the eventual disposal of *ex votos* would have been a practice with as many variants as their dedication. Retention of *ex votos* after dedication would seem to have been a necessity, in that they were, even long after their dedication and after their specific original context of meaning had been exhausted, both ornaments and advertisements for the place of dedication. Votive and sacred items generally were deposited in a *favissa*, a pit for the reception of such objects that were no longer needed but still dedicated to a deity, and we must envisage that such a clearing-out of *ex votos* happened at regular intervals at such religious sites. This rite of burial could also apply to statuary, as seen at the religious site of West Hill, Uley, Gloucestershire where the head of the cult statue of Mercury was carefully interred after the end of the life of the temple.

Many instances are known of what would seem to be the ritual disposal of seemingly utilitarian objects in pits at Roman military sites, of which Newstead, Melrose, Scotland is the best example. At Newstead the phenomenon was centred on an annexe which lay to the south of the main fort complex. Both within as well as outside the annexe boundary ditches a number of huge pits was excavated which were originally interpreted in some cases as wells that had naturally gone out of use and which had then been used as ready-made rubbish pits in which material from the forts could be dumped and backfilled.

However, the diversity and range of material dumped in some of these pits/wells was such that questions had to be asked about the definition of rubbish when applied to the contents of the pit backfills. Not only was there a range of domestic pottery vessels represented but also metal vessels, wooden artefacts, in some cases well-preserved in the waterlogged conditions which existed at the basal levels of some features, and some more extraordinary objects, including one of the renowned cavalry parade helmets discussed in Chapter Five, which would appear to have gone into the ground in a virtually mint condition. There was also animal bone and other types of environmental material such as wood and leather. In the case of Newstead the direct physical relationship between the fort and enclosure ditches and the particularly large quantity of military artefacts and equipment recovered during the excavations, meant that there was no hesitation in the site being characterised as a military annexe. It was later that the ritual aspects of the site were brought out in academic discussion, with structured deposition being suggested as having taken place there alongside the more profane aspects of the use of the site.

More examples of such ‘Newstead pits’, as they have become known to archaeologists, were subsequently excavated there. While no objects quite as unusual as those uncovered by James Curle in 1905-1910 were recovered in the later campaigns of excavation, nevertheless a significant new data set was added to the pit groups and allowed for a reinterpretation of some of the patterns of waste disposal at the site to be undertaken. In Newstead’s south annexe the pits excavated would seem to have been in use for the disposal of rubbish and deposition of other material around the middle of the second century AD. A pattern of the use of these pits was established which suggested that they were not all in use at the same time, with perhaps fifteen to twenty pits being open at any one time. At some period other activity connected with metalworking took place within the annexe at the same time as some of the pits were in use for rubbish disposal. While undoubtedly the majority of the material dumped into the pits could be defined as rubbish, nevertheless some items certainly could not, including the parade helmet, perfectly serviceable tools, and so on. Certain types of material seemed to appear only in pit contexts, as opposed to the activity areas examined by the later excavators. Thus at Newstead there could be seen to be trends in the selection of material for disposal, patterns of structured deposition, and ‘special deposits’ in some pits. The context for these deliberate acts remains uncertain,

however, for specifically religious items were seldom included amongst the dumped material.

The burial of a huge cache of over eight hundred and seventy five thousand iron nails in a pit at the Scottish fort site of Inchtuthil could also have been something more than a tidying-up exercise at the time of the abandonment of the fort; it may have had symbolic value in itself and constitute the closing off of a temporal episode of Roman occupation here. The sealing of the nail cache under a thick gravel deposit in the pit implies that the gravel was a formal closing deposit of some kind.

Thus, it may be that the Roman army symbolically marked the end of a later period of occupation in Scotland at the time of the decommissioning and abandonment of the Antonine Wall in the AD 160s with a series of ritual acts including the careful burial of the significant and clearly still potent distance slabs.

We know very little about the processes and procedures associated with the demolition or replacement of an imperial monument, and the Antonine Wall must be considered as such, though we know full well that this took place in Rome on a fairly regular basis, and was not always linked to the carrying out of the rites of a *damnatio memoriae*. It is only really for late antiquity that evidence exists for a formal official controlling such activity in a systematic way. Inscriptions and other sources attest to the existence of a Roman official known as the *curator statuarum*, an office that appears to have been created around the time of Constantine or just shortly before. However, we do not know the exact role of this *curator* and whether he was concerned with the upkeep of works of art in Rome, their protection, repair and conservation in other words, or whether the role allowed for the more active collecting of statuary from sites or monuments being cleared in the city and their safe storage, perhaps for future reuse. In an age when the use of *spolia* had become a cultural norm it is very tempting to view the *curator's* job as encompassing the latter, more active role and responsibility. The existence of the *curator statuarum* at this time might be seen as evidence that the facilitating of the collection of *spolia* and its careful curation was a prerequisite for the use of such material in new contexts where the processes of selection and curation became subservient to the act of the creation of a new work of art or building.

For example, artworks from monuments associated with Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius were reused in the Arch of Constantine. Why had these earlier monuments been taken down in the first place? Why had the artworks from them been stored? And where had they been stored? Whether the earlier monuments were systematically demolished all together for the express purpose of harvesting these stones again must remain a largely unanswerable question. If this was not the case, and the monuments had been taken down at an earlier period or periods, it is likely that the artworks and other pieces of sculpture had been stored in a depot of some kind and curated in some way. Curation implies some kind of protective code for artworks bearing imperial

images, something that is not attested by documentary sources but which would be the flipside of the process of *damnatio memoriae* where images were deliberately damaged as punishment under official sanction.

It is generally accepted that the use of *spolia* became quite common under the Tetrarchy and indeed Diocletian's monument known as the *Arcus Novus*, though known only to us by fragments from its structure, would seem to have been the forerunner of the Arch of Constantine in this respect. It may be that in Rome a store-yard for sculptural marbles existed in the Campus Martius and indeed fragments of statues of Dacians have been found there, as were indeed the so-called Cancelleria Reliefs from the reign of Domitian. The base of one of the giant Dacian statues on the Arch of Constantine bears the graffito '*ad arcum*' - 'to the arch', implying that this was a transit instruction for its removal from a store-yard to the site of the arch.

While the Antonine Wall distance slabs were not curated with a view to future reuse, they were afforded a method of disposal by careful burial that implied that they carried a heady symbolic value. If the decoration on some of the slabs represented an early manifestation of the politicisation of the aesthetics of pain in Antonine and later Roman imperial art then such raw subject matter, part of a narrative of a conquest now reversed, needed both a literal and a metaphorical laying to rest.

Further discussion on the afterlife of certain Roman artefacts and artworks in the Roman north will form the basis of Chapter Eight.

Ghosts in the Present

The concept of 'hauntology', as put forward by the French literary theorist Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book 'Spectres of Marx' and further developed by the British cultural theorist Mark Fisher, can perhaps provide some guidance in a situation such as this. Obviously a portmanteau word, an amusing play-on-words with regard to the idea of 'ontology' and 'haunting', hauntology is a term for describing temporal disjunction and harnessing nostalgia for a lost future. In the context of the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs, in a way we have nothing but traces, as the full set of slabs is incomplete, but the patterns that emerge from following those traces suggest that the imperial programme that underwrote the text and images on the integrated series of distance slabs was primarily concerned with lauding the achievements of the emperor as commander in chief of the army but that it had also chosen to valorise and heroise the legions and legionary soldiers themselves for the sake of ideological positions. Therefore the spirits of those soldiers were called forth in inscriptions, giving form to their future absence, the *elogia*-style repetition also suggesting the linking of those present (the viewers) to those from the past (absent and perhaps long dead).

The afterlife of the slabs, once the expansionist project represented by the Antonine frontier came apart, somehow accentuates and then distorts any reading of their meaning. In this afterlife they seem to deal with issues of family (the army), fracture, memory, and grief, and a curious strangeness infuses the seemingly real, normal and banal message that they were originally intended to convey.

That sixteen out of the twenty known legionary distance slabs from the Antonine Wall should have carried quantified details of the building work carried out by the legionary work parties of the different units stationed there initially might not appear particularly noteworthy. However, as has been suggested above, the depiction of work in the Roman world and allusion to it in inscriptions should be considered as a social and cultural phenomenon and such a sustained programme of the precise recording of physical work undertaken to build the frontier works both situates the stones precisely in their contemporary present yet at the same time instantly places them in past time. This temporal disjunction, this playing with time, image, symbol, and text, makes the distance slabs perhaps the most enigmatic and interesting artworks from the northern frontier zones of Roman Britain. The notion of work as a political and ideological concept was starkly presented here in the form of a deliberately repetitious formula on the slabs for recording built lengths of wall as part of the imperial strategy for using art and imagery to demonstrate absolute control of the frontier through an understanding of the psychogeography of the conquered territory. Above all, the images and texts on the distance slabs can be read as both invoking and questioning the nature of contemporary military identity, and to a certain degree masculine identity at the time. In the next chapter attention will turn to discussion of the way in which artefacts and images were used by civilians in the Roman north to exhibit and define their identities.

Chapter Seven

Image and Identity

Self and Identity

The concept of self in Roman Britain, as reflected in the portrait representation of private individuals in the province, through visual, principally sculptural, representation would not appear to have been particularly well developed. The primacy of group dedication of inscriptions celebrating architectural projects in the province over individual dedication is also apparent. Visual self-representation through commissioning of images and epigraphic dedication by an individual were undoubtedly linked phenomena. In certain urban situations the advertisement of self could conversely imply selflessness, an immersion into the whole, the social body of the tribe or group, into the province, into the empire. Reflections of self could also be made through the presentation of a physical self-image.

Evidence to be considered then for the expression and advertisement of the self takes two principal forms, portrait sculpture and the naming of individuals in formal public inscriptions. Having set up this discussion it might now appear slightly perverse to acknowledge that there is surprisingly little evidence recovered to date from Roman Britain to suggest that the commissioning of portrait sculpture and the setting up of dedicatory public inscriptions by named individuals was common, or rather as common as in many other provinces.

In the volumes published in the *CSIR* for Great Britain only a handful of sculptures is classified as formal portraits of private individuals. While there are probably a few dozen sculpted stone heads both of male figures and, lesser in number, of female figures from Roman Britain which might be portrait heads, the majority of these can probably be discounted as being more likely to have been representations of male and female deities rather than mortal private individuals. From the Roman north maybe only a mid to late second century AD small stone head of a young woman from a statue from Aldborough could potentially be a portrait sculpture as we understand it. Certainly a number of imperial portraits both in stone and bronze are present in the archaeological record from Roman Britain, and a number of these from the north have already been discussed in Chapter Two, but this is hardly surprising given the numerous official military and civic venues in which the exhibition of such portraits would be expected to have taken place.

In the previous chapters discussion centred on the way in which art in northern Roman Britain from military contexts commonly provided a means by which various facets of identity could be explored, presented, and promoted. Among the media used to promote military identity was the decorated and inscribed grave stele or

tombstone. Certainly there is a significant, though still not large, body of recovered tombstones from Roman Britain on which images of the named deceased appear—not portraits as such—and these are important in helping to demonstrate the role that post-funerary display could play in the formation of the post-mortem social self. Death reveals our materiality, showing that our bodies are merely matter which can be touched, disfigured, or destroyed, and feeding the drive towards the need to reflect that bodily materiality in funerary monuments and images. There can be said to have been a narrative persona and a visual persona presented to viewers of Roman funerary monuments.

The number of non-military tombstones or stelae recovered from northern Roman Britain bearing an image or partial image of the deceased or of the deceased and their family or heirs is difficult to confidently and accurately quantify, mainly because of the large assemblage of defaced and broken funerary monuments from Chester which complicate attempts to count. However, it would seem that somewhere between 60–80 such tombstones are now known from the Roman north. Both men and women are well-represented. Just over thirty of the private funerary monuments from Roman Britain as a whole bear representations of women, that is females over fourteen years of age. These are principally tombstones, but the group includes one sarcophagus; the majority come from either northern England or London. The types of images break down as follows: a woman and man together, in all cases assumed to be husband and wife; a woman, husband, and child/children together; a full length image of a woman on her own; a head or bust of a woman; a woman lying on a funerary couch; and a woman seated in a chair.

The kind of information which can be gained from close analysis of the decorated civilian tombstones will now be demonstrated by the discussion of a small number of individual examples.

The third century AD tombstone of Callimorphus and Serapion from Chester (Figure 75) utilises the common funerary banqueting couch motif to locate the two deceased as part of a thriving community in Chester where stones displaying this motif were unusually common, with at least seven examples being recorded from there. By choosing this locally-significant motif Callimorphus or his heirs were making a very specific point about being members of a social group, about their individual identities being part of, but subsumed within, this group identity. The inscription on the tombstone tells us that Flavius Callimorphus lived to forty two and the child Serapion, who is depicted on his knee, to three years and six months. The stone was dedicated by Thesaeus. The names suggest that the men were Greeks and they may either have been merchants or freed slaves.

The best evidence for the presence of black Africans, or certainly one black African, in Roman Britain comes in the form of a highly-decorated second century AD tombstone

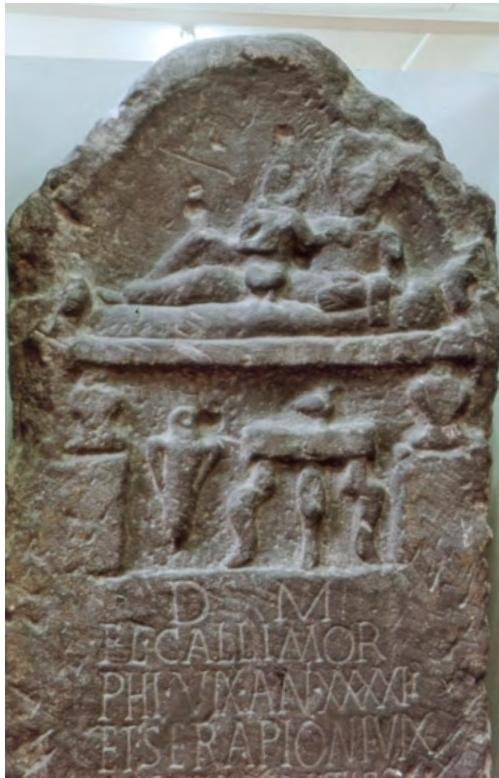


Figure 75 The tombstone of Callimorphus and Serapion from Chester. Second quarter of the third century AD. Grosvenor Museum, Chester. (Photo: Author).



Figure 76 The tombstone of Victor from South Shields. Mid to late second century AD. Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum, South Shields. (Photo: Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums).

from South Shields (Figure 76), found in two parts but otherwise complete apart from some damage to the face and head of the image of the deceased on the stone. The deceased, Victor is portrayed in a common format for certain civilian tombstones, lying on a couch with a goblet or glass, presumably of wine, in his hand. Below the tiny figure of a serving boy proffers Victor another goblet of wine. Above, in a triangular-shaped pediment are the image of a lion's head with a ring through its mouth and to either side portrait busts. The inscription reads '*D(is) M(anibus) Victoris natione Maurum [a]nnorum XX libertus Numeriani [e]q(u)itis ala(e) I Asturum qui piantissime pr[ose] qu(u)tus est*', translated as 'To the spirits of the departed (and) of Victor, a Moorish tribesman, aged 20, freedman of Numerianus, trooper of the First Cavalry Regiment of Asturians, who most devotedly conducted him to the tomb.' It must be considered whether the seemingly-isolated damage to the face of Victor on the tombstone was targeted vandalism of some sort or whether this damage took place at the same time that the tombstone was broken into two pieces and disposed of. The style and form of the tombstone bear echoes of Palmyrene art, as indeed does the tombstone of Regina discussed below, also from South Shields.



Figure 77 Tombstone of Julia Velva from York. Mid-third century AD. Yorkshire, Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).

Some of the most significant decorated tombstones from the Roman north are of women who lived and died in the region. Examination of some of these funerary images of women from northern Roman Britain provides some kind of a snapshot of the broader picture in the province, though it is not suggested here that the situation in northern Britain was necessarily typical. In many respects it was indeed atypical. There is surprisingly little evidence recovered to date from Roman Britain to suggest that the commissioning of funerary monuments for named civilian individuals was common outside of the north and London.

The three most striking individual tombstones of women from Roman Britain

are those of Julia Velva from York, Curatia Dinsia from Chester, and Regina from South Shields in the northern military zone. The inscription on Julia Velva's third century AD tombstone (Figure 77) reads: '*D(is) M(anibus) Iulie Velue pientissi me uixit an(nos) L Aurel(ius) Mercurialis her(es) faci undum curauit uiuus sibi et suis fecit*', translated as '*To the spirits of the departed (and) of Julia Velva: she lived most dutifully 50 years. Aurelius Mercurialis, her heir, had this set up, and in his lifetime made this for himself and his family.*' The two pinecones in the upper corners of the stone are common Roman images associated with death and mortuary commemoration. The carved scene on the tombstone depicts three individuals who must be assumed to be Julia Velva herself, her hair arranged in an elaborate fashionable hairstyle, lying propped up on a banqueting couch, supporting her head with her left hand and holding a drinking vessel in the right hand, a heavily-bearded man in a short tunic and mantle holding a scroll who may be her husband and heir L. Aurelius Mercurialis, standing in front of a small table with claw feet, a young girl seated in a wicker chair and holding a bird in her hands as they rest on her knees who may have been her daughter, and a young male holding a jug in one hand and a pail-like container in the other and standing next to a table holding other vessels and who might be Julia Velva's servant. It could be argued that there is a significant contrast between the lack of individual detailing of the faces, bodies, and clothing of the people portrayed in this image and the highly-detailed rendering of the items of furniture which can be tied in to well-known standard Roman types. Though funerary banqueting scenes such as this were quite



Figure 78 The tombstone of *Regina* from South Shields. Late second century AD. Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum, South Shields. (Photo: Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums).

common in Roman Britain and reflected a much broader Roman interest in the banquet, this is one of the most intimate family funerary images from the whole of Roman Britain and I always feel that I am somehow intruding and eavesdropping on a private scene when viewing this image.

The inscription on Curatia Dinsyia's early third century AD tombstone reads: 'D(is) M(anibus) Curatia Dinsyia uix(it) an(nos) XXXX h(eres) f(aciendum) curauit', translated as '*To the spirits of the departed, Curatia Dinsyia lived 40 years: her heir had this erected*'. On it she is depicted lounging on a high-backed banqueting couch, one hand holding a goblet or beaker while her other hand rests on a

cushion. A small table stands on the floor in front of the couch. Above her are doves and garlands, and above those, in the spandrels above the niche containing the main image, are two tritons blowing conch shells. As noted above, such banqueting scenes would seem to have been particularly popular with the civilian community at Chester.

The images of both Julia Velva and Curatia Dinsyia, both mature women at the time of their deaths, take a similar form and both women were represented as strong, self-reliant figures. In the case of Julia Velva it was obviously felt important to portray her as a mother, as well as an individual woman of high status and means. While the inscription on *Regina*'s tombstone from South Shields provides a more detailed and nuanced biography of her, in the case of Julia Velva and Curatia Dinsyia it was the images on their tombstones that were intended to inform the viewer most about their individual identities.

The mid-to-late second-century AD tombstone of *Regina* (Figure 78) from Bath Street, South Shields, to the south-west of the Roman fort there, represents an object lesson in how much more informative visual culture can be when an image, in this case a carving on a Romano-British tombstone, is accompanied by an inscription. Again, being able to put a name to the individual or individuals portrayed in an image also represents a pleasing form of closure for those who study such remains of the past.

Acquiring the epigraphic habit as well as a knowledge of visual signs and symbols and of modes of status representation would have placed Regina and her family firmly in the mainstream of provincial society in Britain at that time. Or would it?

On her tombstone, now in *Arbeia Roman Fort Museum*, Regina is depicted in a gabled niche flanked by two pilasters. She sits in a high-backed wicker chair facing directly out at the viewer. She wears a long-sleeved, floor-length tunic and an over-robe or coat, a cable necklace, and cable bracelets on both wrists. Unfortunately the area of her head has been badly damaged and so we are unable to say anything about her facial features, hairstyle, or any hair ornament or covering, though it could be that she was wearing a bonnet of some kind, with long locks or strands of hair protruding from under the bonnet and hanging down onto her neck. On her lap in her left hand she holds a distaff and spindle, while on the ground to her left sits a basket of wool and another possible distaff. On the floor to her right is a casket, probably a jewellery box, though it could be a strongbox or a container of toilet articles, which she holds open with her right hand. In the composition and style of the carving of this particular tombstone there can be no doubt about the apparent influence of Palmyrene art styles on its design and execution.

From the image itself we can probably assume that Regina was a respectable woman, a provincial equivalent of the staid Roman matron, pictured in the home whose smooth operation she oversaw. She took evident pride in spinning and wool-working, and an acceptable feminine interest in her appearance, as reflected in her wearing of jewellery and the depiction of her private jewel casket. Wool-working was considered an appropriate and seemly craft for elite Roman women, even for an imperial woman such as Livia, and was a symbolic signifier of feminine virtues and moral probity. Sometimes it had a further particular cultural resonance in certain provincial societies in the empire, as in Pannonia where it was a marker of female ethnic identity, as well as status. Textile-working and weaving therefore need not necessarily be seen as a means by which Roman or Romanised society could control women and establish order. However, we are very far away from being able to talk about Roman or Romanised women subverting the presentation of their craftwork in some way in order to express their feelings rather than simply their status, tempting though it is to think about a Roman equivalent to the idea of the ‘subversive stitch’, to use Rozsika Parker’s useful and alluring phrase.

Regina’s dress is much more elaborate than most of the costumes worn by other Romano-British women depicted in funerary images, though as there are so few of these in total this might not necessarily be particularly significant.

The inscription on Regina’s tombstone reads: ‘*D(is) M(anibus) Regina liberta et coniuge Barates Palmyrenus natione Catuallauna an(norum) XXX*’, translated as ‘To the spirits of the departed (and to) Regina, his freedwoman and wife, a Catuvellaunian by tribe,

aged 30, Barates of Palmyra (set this up)'. Underneath this formal Latin inscription is a less formal line of abbreviations in Palmyrene Aramaic which reads in translation in full as 'Regina, the freedwoman of Barate, alas'. Thus from the inscription we learn her name, her tribal or ethnic origin in the south-east of England, her social status as a slave and then as a freedwoman, her marital status, her husband's name and ethnic origins, and her age at death, making our interpretation of the tombstone even more complex and nuanced. Regina was far from being a Romano-British equivalent of a Roman matron; leaving aside her having been a British slave so many generations after *Britannia* had become a Roman province, we now see that she was probably a well-travelled woman whose manumission and subsequent marriage represented an extraordinary series of social transformations, of a kind perhaps not necessarily quite so common in the Roman empire as we might think.

Possibly even more can be added to this already complex picture by the fact that remarkably we also have part of a tombstone from Corbridge, again in the north but some distance away from South Shields, of a Palmyrene who some academics have suggested might just be the same Syrian man Barates. This is, however, somewhat speculative, as the inscription on the tombstone is incomplete. It reads: '[D(is)] M(anibus) []rathes Palmorenu(s) uexil(l)a(rius) uixit an(n)oos LXVIII', in translation, 'To the spirits of the departed: []rathes, of Palmyra, a flag-bearer (or some say 'a flag seller'), lived 68 years'.

The final point to be made about Regina's tombstone is an obvious one which nevertheless needs raising. There is no way of knowing whether Regina had any hand in approving the design of her tombstone or the wording of the epigraphic inscription on it. She may have died suddenly before any such arrangements had been set in train, and what we are seeing may well be Barates's version of Regina's reality, an image and view of a dead woman filtered through the grief of her evidently-loving husband and ex-master. In Romano-British society portrait sculpture was an art not widely embraced, and it is unlikely that an image of her could have been created in any circumstances other than death, given her status and the society in which she lived and from which she came. The total number of decorated tombstones from Roman Britain is quite small and of those the majority are for men, principally members of the Roman army, so for us to know so much about Regina is almost as extraordinary as her personal story.

Thus analysis of this tombstone demonstrates that at this time gender could shift significantly according to its inter-relationship with culture, class, and ethnicity and, of course, with age as well. It also shows how diverse audiences of viewers throughout the Roman empire could, with the correct understanding of the dominant ideology and its symbolism, interpret or view a particular work of art according to a collective view of the world forged under other skies. Regina, a Romano-British freed slave, a freedwoman, was celebrated at death by her Palmyrene husband and presented at

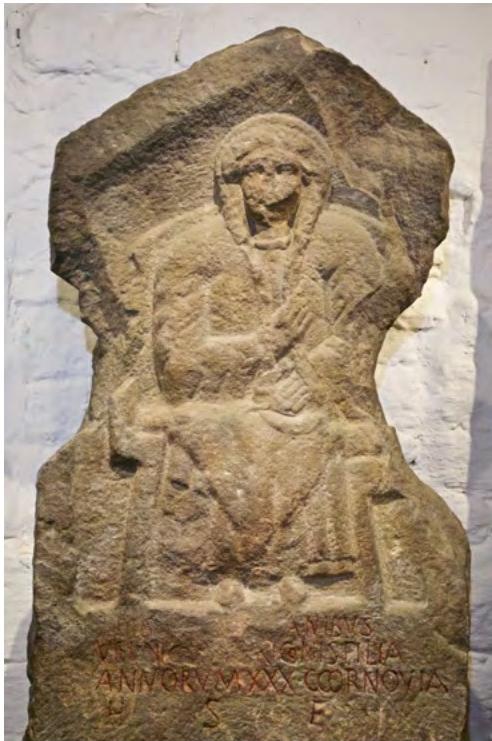


Figure 79 Tombstone of a woman from Ilkley, West Yorkshire. Late first or early second century AD. Manor House Museum, Ilkley. (Photo: Ilkley Manor House Trust).



Figure 80 Tombstone of Aurelia Aureliana from Carlisle. Mid-third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

death as an image of a good wife, adept at female crafts, and proud to display her material possessions. A similarly-powerful portrayal of a Romanised woman with a bird in her lap, holding a fan with one hand and resting her other hand on her son's shoulder, comes from Carlisle. Unfortunately damaged, and without the inscribed panel which would have revealed her name to us along with some biographical details this second century AD monument is nevertheless still a strong visual statement of individual commemoration.

A number of other images of women on tombstones from the Roman north are also illustrated here. From Ilkley, West Yorkshire comes a late first or early second century AD tombstone of a woman depicted seated on a chair (Figure 79). She wears a torc and the now-fragmentary dedicatory inscription tells us that she came from the *civitas* or territory of the Cornovii, much further south and centred on Wroxeter in Shropshire. Aurelia Aureliana (Figure 80) was buried in Carlisle in the mid-third century AD. She is depicted on her tombstone holding a bunch of poppies. An image of Flavia Augustina appears on a mid-third century AD tombstone from York (Figure 81), notable because

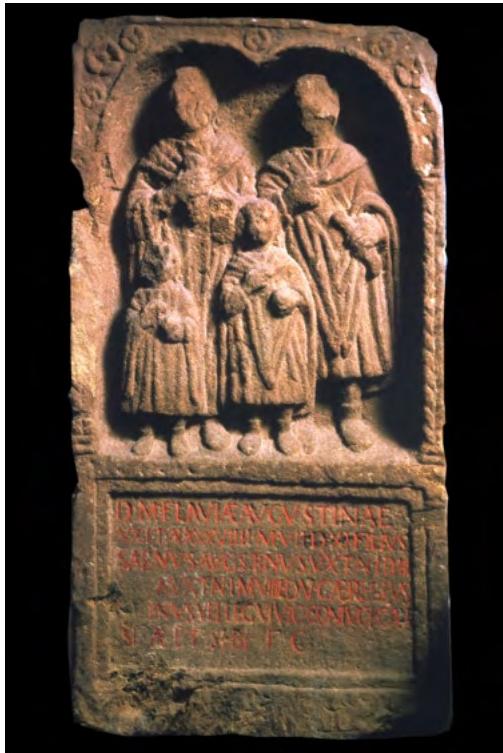


Figure 81 Tombstone of Flavia Augustina from York, depicting family group. Mid-third century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).



Figure 82 Tombstone of a man holding flowers from York. Late first to early second century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).

she was here depicted as part of a family group, with her husband Caius Aeresius, a veteran of the Sixth Legion and their two children.

A later first century AD tombstone from York, sadly missing its inscription, carries an interesting image of a man wearing a long sleeved tunic and a cloak and with a torc around his neck. He is clean shaven, with forward-combed hair ending in a short fringe. He faces out directly at the viewer. He carries a scroll in one hand and, most unusually, in the other he holds what appears to be a bunch of flowers, possibly poppies, held in the manner in which we might expect to see a military centurion holding a switch. This raises the possibility that this man was a retired soldier, an army veteran who either wished himself or whose heirs wished to be represented in some way alluding to this fact. If there had been an inscription on the stone the veteran status of the deceased would most certainly have been cited in the epitaph. On the other hand it is possible that he was not an ex-military man but rather that the flowers were purely symbolic, an image whose permanence belied the short life of real flowers and of the human body.



Figure 83 Tombstone of a family from Ilkley, West Yorkshire. Mid-third century AD. Manor House Museum, Ilkley. (Photo: Ilkley Manor House Trust).

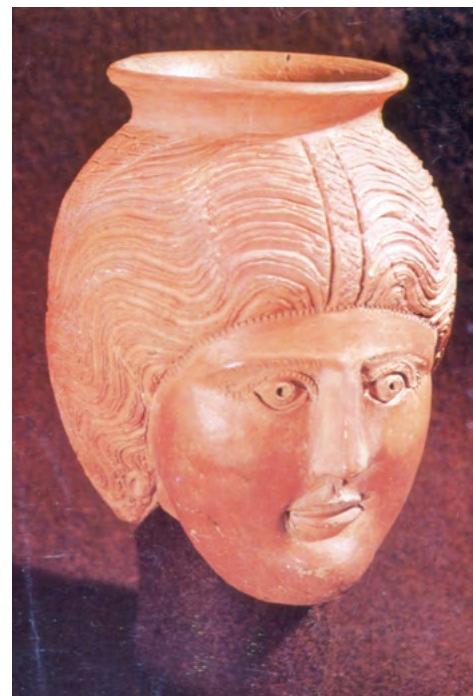


Figure 84 Head pot of a woman from Piercebridge, County Durham. Early third century AD. Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle. (Photo: Author).

A mid-third century stele or tombstone from Ilkley in Yorkshire, in the museum there, depicts a family group. The stone is unusual in that though the part of the stone on which an ansate panel for an epitaph is intact, no inscription was cut. Given that it is unlikely that the stone can hardly be said to have been a workshop piece ready to be bought off the peg by a local family of three it is difficult to think of a logical explanation for the presence of the image but the absence of an inscription. The image depicts a family of father, mother, and a young boy standing frontally, side by side, in a niche surmounted by a shell. The man is bearded and wears a long tunic and cloak. The woman has an elaborate hairstyle. She wears two long tunics and a mantle. She holds a glass in one hand and a purse in the other. The child is dressed in a similar tunic to his father; he holds what might be a loaf of bread or a cake in one hand and a scroll in the other. Are we seeing here a true and full representation of a loving family or are we seeing what Natalie Kampen has called 'a family fiction'?

Identity in funerary commemoration could also be expressed by, or for, the deceased by the inclusion of particular grave-goods in burials. It has already been noted in Chapter

Two that head pots and face pots became popular in burials at York in the early part of the third century AD, in some cases as a reaction to the temporary presence of the Severan imperial court there. This probably became a broader northern trend. Indeed, the head pot illustrated here comes from Piercebridge in County Durham (Figure 84) and is one of the finest examples of the type known.

Self and Materiality

Individual identity could also have been expressed and displayed by the choice and acquisition of certain types of goods, particularly those made of imported, exotic, or rare materials. Perhaps identity could also have been expressed by the use of specifically regional materials from the north. Thus in both cases the very materiality of these individualising objects would have rendered them as artworks of some sort, whether they were decorated or not.

An extremely rare imported large Roman stone cinerary urn found in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century, whose significance had been subsequently overlooked, has recently again been brought to the attention of the academic community by Fraser Hunter. Though its provenance is not altogether clear, the urn, carved from Egyptian travertine, must have come from the cemetery of the fort at Camelon on the Antonine Wall and have contained the cremated remains of an elite officer or administrator who had brought the urn to Britain with him, perhaps directly from Italy or Rome where it would have been manufactured to order. It could date to either the late first century AD or the mid-second century, these being the dates of the two periods of occupation of the fort here. Though undecorated and now missing part of its body and its whole lid, the urn must be thought of as having been a luxury item, given the source of the stone from which it was made, and as an art object by reason of its aesthetic qualities reflected in its honey-yellow, almost golden, banded colour and in its form. Only one other such urn, called ‘tureen’-type funerary urns’, has been found in Roman Britain in the provincial capital London, and indeed only three in total, including the two British examples, in the whole of the north-western provinces of the empire.

Not as aesthetically pleasing or quite so prestigious a luxury item as the Camelon urn, fragments of two further unusual imported vessels probably of the Antonine period, a small bowl and a large dish, presumably part of a luxury dinner service, are known from the fort at Castlecary, also in Scotland, these being made of black Egyptian basalt, and their finding there is nevertheless highly significant.

As far as I am aware, only three items of marble sculpture come from Roman Scotland: part of the thigh and leg from an Antonine statuette or small statue from Castlecary; a small probably second century AD youthful torso, perhaps of Apollo or Mercury, again from a statuette, from Leader Water, Drygrange near Newstead; and the head of a middle-aged man, most likely, as I argued above in Chapter Two, a high-ranking

administrative official rather than a member of the imperial family, from a Trajanic statue from Hawkshaw. From northern England there are five marble statuary items. From York comes the massive fourth century AD portrait head of Constantine once thought to have been carved of local stone, a small marble head from a second to third century AD statuette possibly of Venus, a first to second century AD statuette of a Muse or a Nymph, and a mid-second century AD statuette of a man with a laurel wreath, possibly an athlete, an appropriate find for the bath house context in which it was found. From Aldborough comes a second or third century AD head from a small statue of a female deity. All of these were presumably imported or brought as finished items rather than being sculpted in Britain, and the marble as a material must have had some particular significance to the owners of these particular pieces.

Architectural marbles of different kinds correctly might be thought of as having been quintessential Roman materials, prestige commodities, which would have added both vibrant yet subtle colour and contrast to buildings when used as columns and wall facing material. The use of imported marbles in Romano-British architectural settings and of British equivalents such as Purbeck ‘marble’ was nowhere near as common as might have been thought and its use seems to have seldom gone further north in Britain than Lincoln, though stone identified as green porphyry has been recovered from rural Roman sites at Barnburgh, near Doncaster in South Yorkshire and Rudston in East Yorkshire. The situation at York, for instance, from where at least some marble statuary is known, is not altogether clear, though at a settlement of this size architectural embellishment of some of the city’s major buildings in marble might have been expected. Though fragments of architectural marbles, including *giallo antico*, have been found in Post-Medieval horizons during excavations in the city it is uncertain whether these represent redeposited Roman items or are contemporary with the deposits in which they were found. No architectural marble has been found securely stratified in Roman deposits. At Chester a piece of an inscribed commemorative tablet in Purbeck marble, dating possibly to the later first century AD, was found in the nineteenth century in association with the remains of a large colonnaded building. Some of those house owners in the north who chose to have their interior room walls decorated with wall plaster painted to imitate the colours, striations, banding, and appearance of marbles might well have made this conscious choice to compensate for not being able to access or afford the real thing. Perhaps for these house owners the appearance and effect were indeed everything.

It was suggested in Chapter One that a regional character to northern Roman sculpture was to some extent provided by the exploitation and use of locally-sourced stone. In a similar way the same claim towards distinct regionality can also perhaps be thought to rest with items made with jet and other northern ‘shiny black materials’, as archaeologists dub them. Jet would have principally been sourced from the North Yorkshire coast around Whitby. The material can be retrieved in lumps or pieces washed or eroded out of the cliffs or in narrow seams in the cliff faces: I know from the

experience of going out looking for raw jet with one of my uncles who was a lighthouse keeper at Whitby that it can be found relatively easily by those in the know.

Jet in the Roman world was a material which was deemed to be imbued with magical properties and in Roman Britain was a material which was often used for the manufacture of items of apotropaic value, as will be discussed below in relation to decorated jet amulets, carved jet animals, and a carved jet knife handle from Binchester fort in County Durham. In the north, jet workshops are known to have operated in Roman York and also at South Shields, and jet working is attested on site at Binchester fort, particularly in the later phases dating to the mid-fourth and into the fifth century AD, with working waste also being present in a number of other phases there. However, it is possible that the carved knife handle from Binchester was made off site and that it reached the fort as a finished item. The date of the Binchester jet dog is uncertain, though the horizon in which it was found has been dated to the third to fourth century AD. Although jet working had started in York in the second century AD it did not become particularly popular until the third century, continuing into the fourth century but declining towards the end of the Roman period. The large assemblage of jet items in the Yorkshire Museum in York includes rings, necklaces, beads, bracelets, bangles, pendants and amulets, hairpins, plaques and inlay, and handles.

Adam Parker has recently argued that the small group of ten known jet Medusa pendants or *gorgoneia* from Roman Britain, all found accompanying adult female inhumation burials, potentially can be thought of as having had a magical significance in addition to whatever apotropaic or protective power they were assigned by their owners. Four of these were found in York (Figure 85): the others coming from London, Rochester, Colchester, and Chelmsford. Wear on the face of two of the York pendants suggests that these items were rubbed and touched in a specific way relating to a habitual need for reassurance and some kind of protection, in other words that the pendants were used as part of a series of interactions between an individual and their gods or other perceived invisible protective forces. Thus the idea would appear to have been that these items were viewed as possibly protecting the living individual owner when alive, as well as protecting the dead both in the grave and in the afterlife when placed in a grave alongside a body as a grave-good item. Parker's thesis though would appear to omit certain elements of discussion, centred around gender preference in the choosing of the image.

Belief in the protective powers of jet as a material also extended to the production of oval or rounded carved jet portrait medallions for inclusion in burials at York in the fourth century AD. Each has a pierced lug to enable suspension as a pendant. The three examples so far recovered by archaeological excavation in the city comprise a portrait of a woman on her own, of a husband and wife together (Figure 86), and of a family group of husband, wife and son.



Figure 85 Jet amulet pendant or gorgoneion decorated with an apotropaic head of Medusa from York. Third to fourth century AD. Yorkshire, Museum, York. (Photo:

Image courtesy of York Museums Trust: <http://yorkmuseumtrust.org.uk>).



Figure 86 Carved jet medallion carrying family portrait group of a man and a woman from York. Fourth century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Image courtesy of

Nina Crummy has suggested that in the late Roman period in Britain images of bears, in the form of figurines in jet and other types of images on the reverses of coins, were thought to have acted as protective symbols when placed in a small number of infant burials as grave goods. She very convincingly believes that bear symbolism was connected to the cult of Artemis who had an especial link to childbirth and child-rearing. The limited evidence for this comes from Colchester in the south of Britain and from two sites in northern Roman Britain. Small jet bears have been found in infant burials in Malton and York, and a second jet bear has come from a non-funerary, but perhaps ritual, context in York. In the York burial the bear, pierced to allow it to have been worn as an amulet, was accompanied by a jet bead, a coin, and a



Figure 87 Small carved jet bear from Malton, North Yorkshire. Probably AD 220s. Malton Museum. (Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of Malton Museum CIO. All rights reserved).



Figure 88 Jet knife handle in the form of a dog from Binchester, County Durham. Late third, but probably fourth, century AD. Private collection. (Photo: Author).

pottery beaker. In the Malton burial the bear (Figure 87) was accompanied by a copper alloy bracelet, a single coin again, and a jet bead once more. A bear appears as an image on a cameo from South Shields and an unfinished carved shale head of an animal, possibly a fox, comes from the same site.

A Roman carved jet dog from Binchester was recovered during excavations in 1971 within the fort, to the north of the *praetorium*. Largely complete, the item would appear to have been a knife handle. The third or fourth century AD Binchester carved jet dog (Figure 88) is an extremely well-modelled, three-dimensional piece and is without doubt one of the most accomplished examples of carving in this material from the whole of Roman Britain. The dog's pose is quite striking, partly naturalistic, partly stylised. Quite alert, the beast sits up on its haunches, its back legs tucked up underneath it. Its front legs are straight and angled down, probably with its front paws resting on the ground, though the lower parts of the legs are either missing, as in the case of the right front leg, or damaged, as in the case of the left. When viewed from the

front the dog can be seen to be gracile, with a thin, tapering face and alert open eyes. Its back and neck are modelled almost in a single, graceful, though flattened, curve when viewed from the side, the neck long and slender, the ears held flat against the head, and the mouth partially open. The smooth finish on the dog's body, head, and legs implies that it is of a breed with a smooth, glossy coat. The dog is not portrayed with a collar, though a raised oval zone on its chest, marked across the centre with a roughly-scratched letter 'x' or cross, may be intended to indicate a restraint of some kind or the wearing of an ownership symbol. The dog sits on a rectangular pedestal or plinth that forms the base of the object. The square base is pierced by a now-empty, circular socket hole which extends up into the base, and into which something would have been affixed, possibly with lead solder, as has been established for one of the Roman jet handles from York.

The breed of dog represented is most closely comparable to a present-day greyhound or lurcher. In stylistic terms, that is in terms of its pose, the Binchester dog is curiously not unlike a number of Greek statues of greyhound-like dogs such as a mid-fourth century B.C. example from Pella, Macedonia. Examples of greyhound-like dogs represented in Roman art include the so-called Townley Greyhounds, marble dogs of the first to second century AD from Lanuvio in Italy and the now-fragmentary stone statue of a dog from the temple site at Pagans Hill, Somerset.

While the Binchester carved jet dog could possibly have been a decorative finial of some kind, adorning a piece of furniture perhaps, this seems unlikely. A more probable identification is that it was a handle of some kind, probably from a tanged knife or a medical instrument, though it could possibly also have been from a key, or, less likely, a mirror. The manufacture of handles from jet would have required a large block of raw material from which to work and that this may have accounted for their relative rarity in Roman Britain. Jet handles are also found on the Rhineland where they too are rare and most usually occur in graves.

The ten published jet handles or fragmentary handles in the collection of the Yorkshire Museum, all from York itself and from non-burial contexts, are all are relatively plain, non-figural examples. The decorated examples bear incised oblique lines, scratched lines or grooves or transverse ridges, with the exception of one decorated terminal from a handle which bears a little resemblance to an altar capital. Interestingly, one of the York handles might have been the handle from a medical instrument, rather than being from a utilitarian knife.

There are no direct parallels for the Binchester jet dog. However, jet handles in the form of other types of animal are known from Roman Britain and the Rhineland, figures of dogs do appear on bone and antler handles in Britain, and images of dogs were commonly used in other media in Roman Britain and in the Roman world more widely, often to convey abstract concepts or religious ideas. A number of different types of

animals and birds are found portrayed in jet in Roman Britain. A small, half-finished carved jet or shale dog or fox head in jet or shale comes from South Shields Roman fort. Small carved jet bears are known from a number of Roman burials at Malton and Bootham, and from Colchester. A unique, small jet hare in a crouching position comes from a grave at Colchester. Felines are well represented in jet, examples coming from Silchester, Chelmsford, and Exeter. Images of birds of some kind are found scratched into/incised upon two jet rings from York.

A bone clasp knife handle from Wanborough, Wiltshire is in the form of a greyhound-like dog's head. Another unusual example is a small dog standing on a kind of raised podium forming the terminal of a bone knife handle from Great Chesterford, Essex. More common in Roman Britain in bone and also found in copper alloy was the design of a dog chasing a hare and many continental examples of dogs occurring on knife handles are known.

It is likely that at Binchester the choosing of the image of the dog to adorn the handle of a knife or medical instrument represented a deliberate reflection of some aspect or aspects of the owner's character or religious beliefs and that the marrying of this image with the chosen raw material of jet was seen to be appropriate for a knife that was in all probability to be used for a non-utilitarian, perhaps ritual or religious, purpose of some kind, perhaps connected to the worship of Aesculapius or the Mother Goddesses, although the dog had many other possible symbolic links in Roman religion and art.

Another material considered to have had inherently magical natural properties in the ancient world was amber. Found along the Baltic coastline, this became a significant luxury commodity in the early Roman period, traded as raw material to Italy, particularly to Aquileia in the north, where the amber was then worked and turned into a range of objects. However, in the later Roman period imports into Britain of mainly amber beads apparently came from Germany rather than via northern Italy. Almost ninety per cent of the amber items from Roman Britain are indeed beads, from necklaces and bracelets. The number of amber items from Roman Britain is not particularly large, and indeed many of these items have been found in London, the provincial capital. A catalogue of all the amber items from Roman Britain was published in 2010 by Francis Morris as part of a broader study of North Sea and Channel connectivity in the late Iron Age and Roman period. A small number of further amber finds have been published subsequently by Hella Eckardt in 2014 and Glynn Davis in 2018, making a total of around 275 individual items from just over seventy different sites.

In the Roman north, finds of amber beads at South Shields are worthy of note. A rare and therefore highly-significant find of a decorated carved amber ring from The Lanes site in Carlisle is also important. The ring was carved from a single block of amber and

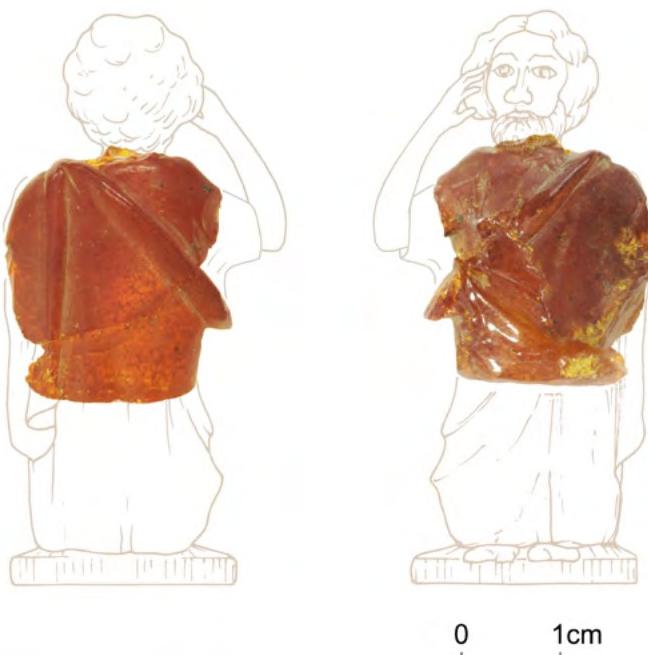


Figure 89 Carved amber figure of an actor from Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire. First century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: Northern Archaeological Associates).

its bezel bears a carving in high relief of the head of the goddess Minerva. It has been suggested that this fine ring was an import or a piece of personal jewellery brought to Britain by its owner at some time in the second or third centuries AD. Whatever the case, it is likely that it was made in Aquileia in north-eastern Italy, the centre for the creation of such luxury products at the time. The signs of wear on the upper part of the ring would appear to indicate that it had been rubbed quite a lot, perhaps as a form of superstitious or magic-based routine. An amber knife handle in the form of a mouse at the finial nibbling a nut or some other kind of food also comes from Carlisle and probably dates to the same period.

During quite recent excavations linked to the upgrading of the A1 road in North Yorkshire, part of an amber figurine (Figure 89) was found at a site at Scotch Corner. Though missing its head, the figurine, once more carved from a single block of raw material, is clearly of a male figure, thought to be an actor after a parallel to this piece which comes from Pompeii, making this first-century AD object an extraordinary and unique find for Roman Britain as a whole and for the northern region in particular. Such highly-complex figurative pieces are otherwise absent from the archaeological record in Britain.

It may well have been the case that Baltic amber was traded in exchange for Roman goods, and as a result reflections of Rome can be found in the material culture of parts of the Baltic region. In the Roman world Baltic amber was not just considered a luxury material: it may well have been considered to have had very specific qualities,



Figure 90 An Indian Sardonyx cameo of a bear from South Shields, Northumberland. Early third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Northumberland. (Photo: Copyright Joanne Ball).

its contexts suggesting links to children and to burials, though in northern Roman Britain numbers of finds are not great enough to allow such contextual information to be gleaned.

Another extraordinary luxury item found in the Roman north, at South Shields, is an Indian sardonyx cameo of a marauding bear eating its prey (Figure 90). The piece is unlikely to have been made in Roman Britain and the find must instead represent the import of a finished piece. Dating to the second or third century AD this is an exquisite and valuable item, once set in an item of jewellery, whose high-status owner might have been a high-ranking officer or imperial administrator. If dating to the third century the cameo might even have belonged to someone associated with the Severan court when it was set up here temporarily in the north during the major military campaign of the time.

Sexual Identities

In the previous two chapters it was discussed how military art in the northern region often acted as a manifestation of hyper-masculine attitudes and identities. Such displays of masculinity or manliness encompassed not only martial images but also religious imagery invoking Mars and the hero-god Hercules in particular. Images of the disembodied male phallus acted as a sign and signal in a similar, but more overt way, in the case of sculpted phallic symbols quite literally writing masculinity onto the landscape and attempting to control the power of place and of access to certain spaces.

The phallus as a symbol was one of the most common motifs in Greco-Roman art, appearing in numerous artistic media across the Roman world. While it was most often probably used as a protective or apotropaic symbol, it was also, nevertheless, a ubiquitous reminder of the dominant social position of the sexualised male in Roman society. The phallic motif needs to be discussed in terms of its numerous meanings and its contexts of use, but it must also be considered from the point-of-view of its more provocative role in representing a generalised male dominance. It is one of a suite of images linked to the display and celebration of hyper-masculinity. In the streets of Pompeii citizens were surrounded on all sides by images of the phallus or erect penis, on walls and paving stones, on decorated shop signs, worn as amulets by children, and so on and a similar situation can be seen to a certain extent to have existed in the Roman north.

Sexual body parts could also be evoked by vocabulary, either spoken or written, and one example from northern Roman Britain provides a good case study of this. A rough carving of a phallus and pine branch on a stone slab from Vindolanda is accompanied by the incised inscription *HP III*, perhaps standing for '*h(abet) p(edes) III*', 'It is three feet long'. This too could be an example of sexual boasting or mocking linked to the phallus.

Studies of sexual symbolism in the Greco-Roman world have perhaps too often placed discussion of the use of the phallus completely beyond the issue of sexuality, by categorising all such imagery as part of a broader category of erotic art. This has, of course, helped to move the definition of such material away from nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century views of its being obscene, but in so doing has perhaps created a false dichotomy itself. It can surely no longer be sustainable to argue that the motif of the phallus was not largely concerned with the construction of maleness and the place of men in Roman society. Ideas relating to fertility and protection, linked to the phallus, are nevertheless also linked to male sexuality and being.

In northern Roman Britain the symbol of the phallus was probably as common as it was in other parts of the empire, and compiling a catalogue of its many appearances is quite beyond the scope of this study, though a catalogue of those carved on stone along Hadrian's Wall has recently been compiled by Rob Collins, along with a typology of these representations. The incidence of carved phalli in the north more broadly has also seen recent discussion by Adam Parker. However, a few observations will be offered here on some of the types of phallic representation found in this part of the province, on the types of objects on which such representations appeared, and on the contexts in which these images and objects were found. The use of phallic symbolism, it has been noted, generally is related to one or more of the following: fertility or ancestral celebration or commemoration; erotic display; apotropaic or protective power; the confirmation of sexual identity in rites of passage; and the advertisement or celebration of male social power and hyper-masculinity. More recently, Adam Parker

has suggested that in some instances and contexts the apotropaic role assigned by academics to certain objects from Roman Britain should more properly be considered to have been not necessarily linked to superstition but rather to a more active belief in the magical properties of those items and how that magic could be linked to individual agency. The meaning of each individual use of an image of the phallus if it can be explained or discerned at all would have been entirely dependant on the context in which the image was deployed.

There was certainly not any kind of phallic cult in Romano-British religion, though the assumed potency of male deities and their presumed ability to intervene on a supplicant's behalf in matters of infertility is apparent at some healing centres. Certainly the god Priapus was known in Roman Britain but he must always have been a fringe figure in Romano-British religion. In the north a possible image of the god appears on a first-second century AD relief from Birrens, in Dumfriesshire, Scotland and on a now-lost, undated relief from Binchester.

Phalluses in one form or another, carved in relief on stone or represented as three-dimensional images in various materials, were common in the Roman north. It is not possible to produce a full quantification of their number here or to compare the number of appearances in the north with the numbers from elsewhere in the province. As an example of the image's ubiquity it is worth noting that Rob Collins catalogued 57 phalli carved in stone within the area defined as the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site alone, which can be examined alongside Adam Parker's catalogue of 49 from the north more broadly. Obviously the figures produced by these two studies do not correlate exactly but both certainly testify to the phallus being a common and significant image. The phalli date from between the second to fourth century AD, most probably being third century. Should we view these as fifty seven individual carvings or each as part of a concerted effort over an extended period of time to provide some kind of protective shield over the troops in the whole frontier zone?

All these stone phalli would have originally been prominently displayed, even if some of the stones were subsequently reused or structures with them on demolished. Some were large, some were small. In art as in life. Very often, though, images of phalluses were used as protective symbols at boundaries, either geographical boundaries or more local boundaries such as household thresholds. This was probably the case with the phallus carved on one of the stones in the abutment of the Roman bridge at Chesters, Northumberland and on the Roman bridge at Willowford, Cumbria. It has also been suggested that the phallic stone from Catterick discussed below might have come from a nearby bridge. Two phallic stones have also been recovered from the curtain wall at the fort at Birdoswald and three from the fortress wall at York. A very large phallus was incised on a quarry face at Barcombe Hill near Vindolanda and another on the so-called Written Rock of Gelt quarry face in Cumbria, a site discussed more fully in Chapter Nine. A phallic stone from the Shoreden Brae mausoleum at



Figure 91 Stone carved with an ejaculating phallus from Catterick, North Yorkshire. Reused in the third or fourth century AD. Yorkshire Museum, York. (Photo: By Damien Ronan. Copyright Northern Archaeological Associates).

Corbridge represents the only known instance of a phallus being used in a funerary context. Two of the phallic carvings are accompanied by inscribed names: at Maryport the name Marcus Septimius appears, and on the carving from Adel, near Leeds, the inscription states that the ‘phallic charm’ belongs to Primus, these two examples probably representing instances of very personal and individual use of the image either for apotropaic or for more formally magical purposes.

The image of a carved phallus on a stone from Vindolanda fort points at an image of what appears to be a group of trees on the same stone. It could be that the phallus is there to give protection to the fort-the built environment-as well as the woods-the natural environment, or it may be that the trees in this image represented the wild untamed countryside of northern Britain that the phallus was acting as protection against.

Adam Parker has divided his assemblage of phallic stones into three categories: basic, stylised, and ‘scenes’, the latter group including examples where the phallus appears in juxtaposition with another image. Probably the most accomplished carving was found quite recently during excavations on the A1 near Catterick and discussion here is now going to centre on this particular carved phallus. The Catterick phallus (Figure 91) is notable because of the sheer attention to detail in its carving. Found in a reused context as a road edging stone, the carving would originally have been prominently displayed, perhaps on a bridge as noted earlier. The phallus is long and thick, decorated with incised lines, the testes are globular and attached to an unusual triangular-shaped form that might presumably represent a zone of public hair. I am not sure that I agree with the interpretation of this triangular element as an image of a comb. This particular phallus is a unique depiction for Roman Britain, in that it is depicted in the act of ejaculation, without there being an evil eye depicted in

opposition to the phallus, as is relatively common in Greco-Roman art. Encapsulated within this single image are ideas of virility and fertility, of hyper-masculinity, of protection and protective magic, and of sexual identity. In its original setting the Catterick phallus could have been intended to be erotic or arousing, an ancient sex aid. It could have been intended to be simply amusing. It could have been somehow satirical, either in terms of satirising male and female sexual relations in general or the sexual tastes and performance of a particular man, woman, or couple. A meaning linked to male potency could have been intended, though it is difficult to marry this interpretation with the figure's wasteful spilling of his seed on the ground rather than during sexual congress. It could have been a bitter, biting comment on the bluster and failed promise of male hyper-masculinity.

If many of the find-spots of carved stone phalli in the Roman north mark what have been called liminal positions, then they might well have acted as a series of symbolic signposts regarding warnings about rights of access, inclusion, and exclusion perhaps. They might have helped define exclusively-male spaces spread out across the northern landscape, points on a mental map.

It is particularly interesting to see the wide range of personal items from Roman Britain on which the phallus appeared and the way that the symbol was deployed there. Such items are found perhaps most commonly on Roman military sites and in urban contexts, though certainly not exclusively. At least one plate brooch in the form of a phallus is known to me and one woman's hairpin. A phallus appears on a gold finger ring from Faversham, Kent and on a bronze ring from London. Phallic pendants, amulets, and mounts made of various materials, including bone and antler, are very common indeed, and perhaps in East Anglia had a particular resonance of some kind. Such pendants and amulets may have been hung around the necks of male children for their protection.

Hand and phallus pendants mark a variation on this theme and would seem to have been particularly favoured in the Roman military north, though a group of four such pendants or amulets in bone, is known, for instance, from Verulamium. At Catterick six copper alloy amulets bear depictions of both male and female symbols, one end having a clenched fist with pointed index finger and a bracelet on the wrist, the other a phallus, with a perforated shell motif at the centre. Five further such amulets were apparently also found together in a child's burial there.

It must not be forgotten, though, that phallic images could also be employed in a humorous way and that ribald, not to say scatological, humour, was very much part of Roman culture, and not just at a plebeian level. Three particular phallic-decorated items from Roman Britain suggest that sexual humour also had its appeal to some at this time. The first object to be discussed here is one of three similar and probably contemporary carved stone figures from the Roman fort of Bar Hill, Dunbartonshire,

Scotland. All three figures appear to be bearded and all have been suggested to be either Silenus, the usually drunk older companion of Bacchus, or a male native deity. The man holds a drinking cup on one on the stones. On the other two, in one instance he holds one of his arms across his chest with the middle finger out in a phallic gesture to ward off the evil eye, or interlopers, or perhaps here barbarians, and in the other folding both arms across his chest with the *fica* gesture being made by his hands. Where these three sculptures would have been displayed is unknown but for their viewers they must have provided some amusement.

Sometimes the self being promoted by imagery was simply the sexual self, and this is well demonstrated by an undated, but definitely Roman, metal detected find of a cast copper alloy knife handle from Askham Bryan in North Yorkshire that takes the form of a couple engaged in vigorous sexual intercourse. The man lies back on a couch and the woman straddles him on top. Such quasi-erotic scenes are common in Roman art in Italy but much rarer in Roman Britain.

In this chapter a number of very specific issues linked to the display and exploration of identity in the Roman north have been discussed. Across these themes the significance of gender, both male and female, as it relates to imagery and representation has been apparent, in terms of contributions to an evolving artistic repertoire in the northern region. Less apparent, but equally important has been the identification of instances and manifestations of the display of ethnic identity, such as the naming of a tribal affiliation in an inscription or the use of Palmyrene tropes and motifs in image construction in the same artwork, and the commemoration of the black African Victor. One manifestation of ethnic identity in the north which was represented by the cultural practices of cooking and eating, rather than by representation, was the use of very specific types of cooking vessels by North African auxiliary units at certain forts on Hadrian's Wall, but discussion of this topic lies outside the scope of this present study. Trying to understand identity formation helps in elucidating the definition of the social function of art in northern society at this time, allowing the linking of certain behaviours mediated by artistic images and used in specific ways to specific places and spaces, in other words to a broader regional identity.

Funerary art was used in the Roman north, as elsewhere in the empire, to help shape social memory in the physical, public realm. The long cycle of artistic growth represented here by the civilian funerary monuments discussed above puts a consoling perspective on human mortality in the present days. In the next chapter the life-cycle of certain artworks in the Roman north will be explored, in terms of how an emotional or ideological afterlife can be suggested for a number of significant programmes of imagery, in the process enhancing, changing, or even subverting the artworks' original meanings in some instances.

Chapter Eight

Remembering and Forgetting

Much of the art from northern Roman Britain discussed in this book was about remembering, yet also at the same time it could equally be said that much of the art, as the contexts in which the art sometimes changed, became about forgetting. In order to pursue this notion, discussion in this chapter will focus on the eventual fates or afterlife of a number of significant northern groups of artefacts and artworks; the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs discussed in Chapter Six above; a collection of tombstones from Chester; an assemblage of objects from the River Tees at Piercebridge, County Durham; a group of altars from Maryport, Cumbria; the so-called Corbridge silver *lanx*; the Traprain Law silver treasure; while various unusual finds assemblages from pits at Newstead in Scotland and the massive cache of iron nails from the fort at Inchtuthil, in Perth and Kinross, Scotland have already been mentioned in previous chapters. Some consideration will also be given to the effects of ‘soft power’ messaging, the decoration of samian ware vessels circulating in the Roman north, and types of glass vessels favoured there.

Context and Change

We should never forget that the commissioning and creation of an artwork or decorated object was just the first stage in the existence of that artwork. Once set up or used, its significance and meaning became defined by the eyes and understanding of its viewers. But such a situation of course might have changed considerably with the passing of time. Artworks might have attained further meaning over time, they might have lost some meaning or indeed all meaning, they might have been reinterpreted and recontextualised. The consideration of the context of redundancy and disposal of an item allows us to think about changes in broader Roman society, changes in ideological or religious positions, and possibly about issues relating to changing identities. We can sometimes detect a crisis of authority, a churning flux, a quickening pulse in proximity to catastrophe reflected in the afterlife of certain objects. Some artworks became uneasy with their original underlying certainty. An opportunity to confront chaos and dread, to hold back a mysterious nemesis rather than to escape it represented a sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin. Yet everything seems as if it was conceived under the pressure of events happening, often involving the pushing-out of new meanings from old subjects. From our own times we can see or interpret changes of mind leading to elided or defaced works, a process of corrections.

This question of time and how its passing can change the meaning of an image or often lead to a loss of meaning has loomed large in this book. History mapped out a narrative in which certain visual ideals mutated. It has already been noted that the careful manipulation of the relationship between narrative time and forensic time is

apparent when looking at the art from northern Roman Britain. This boils down to the distinction between the time that is being narrated by the creation of the artwork and the time at which the narrative was occurring. The art sometimes became about how narrative worked, as well as being about how form and society and language itself moved and progressed. Much of the art often seems like a kind of experiment sourced in cyclic time, but at the same time moving forward through time almost simultaneously.

The Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs and their subsequent disposal by burial in pits at the time of the abandonment of the Antonine frontier was examined at length in Chapter Six, but some of the issues highlighted there will be reiterated here. It could be argued that their disposal represented both a particular mourning for a very specific set of past events and a resolute disavowal of change and the refusal to fully engage mentally with it. In these contexts encounters with art and images not only helped to alter the political and military situation but also the imagination itself. In times of crisis the imagination began to focus on the end of things, on the end of meaning in certain contexts. In the case of the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs and in each of the other examples chosen for discussion here there was represented a different kind of model, with its own tensions and resolutions.

There would surely have been all the difference between the motives behind removing and disposing of anachronistic, senescent statues, or relocating them, and the removal of more recent artworks whose cultural potency and emotional currency were still to a certain degree active. These cases and some of the others presented below must have represented a struggle for control of the meaning of events and of related texts, images, and objects. Both the creation of the artworks, their make-up, and the contexts of their eventual fates argue quite compellingly for the intellectual intricacy of the artworks, no matter how familiar and interpretable the works may now appear to us.

I am suggesting that the idea of an ‘inscape’, a term invented by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins to describe the unique, but not static, design that constitutes each individual identity can equally be applied as a defining term for the character of artworks or objects. Each has or had its own inscape that reflected context, circumstance, and change. The inscape or character such as that situated in these works was much more about response and feeling rather than narrative, and the emotional currency invested in these works and encoded within them meant that their destruction may often have been a traumatic event imbued with anxiety. Viewers of the works in their original contexts would have looked from the still centre of self towards a state in which anxiety and doubt would have crept in when that context was disrupted or changed. Certain artworks would have relied on an awareness and certainty in relation to their form and location respectively to expose the degree to which the viewers trusted their presentation of information and how these shaped their expectations.

A particular subject of great importance that lies outside the scope of this present study is the reception of the Antonine Wall distance slabs in the periods since their unearthing. The contrasting displays today of the huge Bridgeness slab in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh and of all the others at the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow are themselves significant in both museological and ideological terms. In Edinburgh one gains the sense that the Bridgeness slab is now as much a part of Scotland's long, deep history as any other item in the archaeological collections on display. The ebb and flow of history on Scottish soil is palpable to the visitor, as is the notion that the Roman period is quite properly now seen as just a series of marks on a national timeline. Perhaps just such a realisation motivated the process of the slabs' burial. In the Hunterian Museum one feels that the slabs here and the other material on display from the Roman frontier are an integral part of Glasgow's rich city culture, alongside the artworks of the Scottish colourists and the designs of Charles Renee Mackintosh. In neither display have the slabs lost their visual potency.

The circumstances leading to the clearing and removal in the later Roman period of a very large collection of over one hundred Roman tombstones from the cemeteries of Chester has quite recently been studied by Cheryl Clay, with a view to explaining their reuse in the north wall of the legionary fortress. The idea that the disposal of these tombstones reflected a formal incident of iconoclasm, or several instances, is interesting and to some degree compelling as an idea, though not necessarily wholly accepted by the academic community. Indeed, up until relatively recently it had been universally accepted among academics that the Chester tombstones built into this wall were simply stones from an old, redundant cemetery with no latent cultural value to the later inhabitants of Chester: in other words that these stelae were simply reused because they were readily available and saved on the costs of quarrying and providing a certain amount of new stone for the works. However, as Cheryl Clay has pointed out, a small number of the stelae had suffered 'deliberate mutilation' as she termed it and she suggested that this mutilation-with inscriptions smashed off and images defaced- was somehow linked to the presence of *Legio XX Valeria Victrix*-the Twentieth Legion at Chester.

The Twentieth Legion had been stationed at the Chester fortress since around AD 85, replacing *Legio II Adiutrix*-the Second Legion. While some of the stelae exhibited wear consistent with having been set up in the open for some considerable time, others were curiously fresh, suggesting that their reuse was not in fact all that long after they had been erected. Such is the tombstone of Curatia Dinzisia discussed elsewhere in this book. So while all tombstones had been cleared from the cemeteries, only certain ones had been deliberately damaged in the process.

So which stones were defaced, by whom, and why? The two best examples are the third century AD stelae of the legionary veteran Annius Felix and that of a *signifer* or standard bearer that is missing its inscribed panel. The relief figures of both men

now exhibit very specific marks of significant defacement, including many horizontal lines gouged out across the head and body, and evident targeting of the faces and hands of the figures. The standard on the one stone has been defaced to destroy its presentation of the man's legionary affiliation. Yet not all Twentieth Legion tombstones from Chester are so defaced: indeed, earlier in the book I discussed and illustrated the tombstone of the legionary *optio* Caecilius Avitus and yet this too came from the rebuilt stretch of the north wall. Certainly it was broken into two pieces, but was otherwise virtually complete, and without the hacking and gouging seen on some other stones like the ones just described.

Clay's explanation for this defacement is not religious iconoclasm but rather political and ideological iconoclasm, in that it is thought that the Twentieth Legion was cashiered, that is disbanded, under the orders of Constantius I around AD 296, following the ultimate failure of the revolt of Carausius and Allectus. If that was the case, it can be assumed that the legion had somehow supported the usurpers in Britain. Arguing against this kind of political *damnatio memoriae* is the fact that there would appear to have been no thoroughness in damaging all Twentieth Legion stelae and expunging the unit's name from all stones, as might then have been expected.

Whatever the motives and context for the reuse of these stones there exists the main point that some kind of fundamental attitudinal change towards the sanctity of burial sites and towards both old and more recent individual grave memorials had to have taken place for the reuse of these stelae to have been first contemplated and then executed.

Perhaps the broader context of the reuse event in Chester is the late Roman attitude towards *spolia* or reused stone which I have written about elsewhere in relation to the building of the Arch of Constantine in Rome. Again, while conducting another research project I came across the report of the circumstances of the finding of the group of Roman stelae from one of the necropoli servicing Roman Bologna in northern Italy, now known as the *Muro del Reno* assemblage, reused as building stone in a late Roman river revetment wall.

An altogether different kind of assemblage, which met a very different kind of fate or after life, comes from Piercebridge in County Durham. A very large number of small finds have been recovered from the River Tees there and constitute another unusual assemblage from the north which might be said to have both a life and an afterlife defined in the one case by their use and in the other by the context of disuse in which they were disposed of. Divers have recovered thousands of finds here since the mid-1980s and the project of recovery is still on-going. A detailed academic report on the significance of the material recovered so far is currently in press.



Figure 92 Copper alloy figurine of a ram from the River Tees at Piercebridge, County Durham. Second or third century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Philippa Walton).

Material in the river comprised coins, personal items, military equipment, religious objects, medical or cosmetic items, seal boxes, weighing equipment, household equipment and vessels, and fixtures and fittings. Analysis of the coin assemblage suggests that there was an unusually large percentage of coins featuring portraits of empresses and other imperial women, these representing c. fourteen per cent of the overall coin assemblage up to the early 2000s. It may be though that the peak of deposition of coins seen at the site between AD 196-238 has contributed towards this phenomenon, as the early third century AD was in fact a time when more imperial women featured on Roman coinage than had previously been the case, or would be the case later. However, as the overall finds assemblage includes large numbers of hairpins and small finger rings, the proportional bias towards more female images than might have been expected might not be simply have been to do with the third century imperial coinage itself.

Only the religious material with some visual element will be discussed here. The assemblage includes two copper alloy figurines of cupids, a fine figurine of a ram (Figure 92), and a fourth figurine of a tortoise, possibly in these last two cases the attribute animals of Mercury, a pipeclay figurine and a lead plaque, both possibly of Mercury, a small silver plaque bearing an image of Jupiter abducting Ganymede, a miniature socketed axe, five miniature spears, two miniature adzes, a miniature copper alloy leg, and a phallic stud and a phallic amulet. An enamelled horse-and-rider plate brooch is a type most commonly found in religious contexts. Analysis of the assemblage suggests that it represents a second and third century AD votive deposit of some kind and one that had a possible link to female worshippers or to a female deity, presumably a local water deity. The only other comparable votive deposits in Roman Britain are from Coventina's Well in Northumberland, as discussed elsewhere in this book, and the sacred spring at Bath.

The significance of a group of seventeen altars discovered in the 1870s buried in pits at Maryport, Cumbria has recently been reassessed by a new campaign of targeted excavation at the site, a campaign whose principal research aim was to provide further,

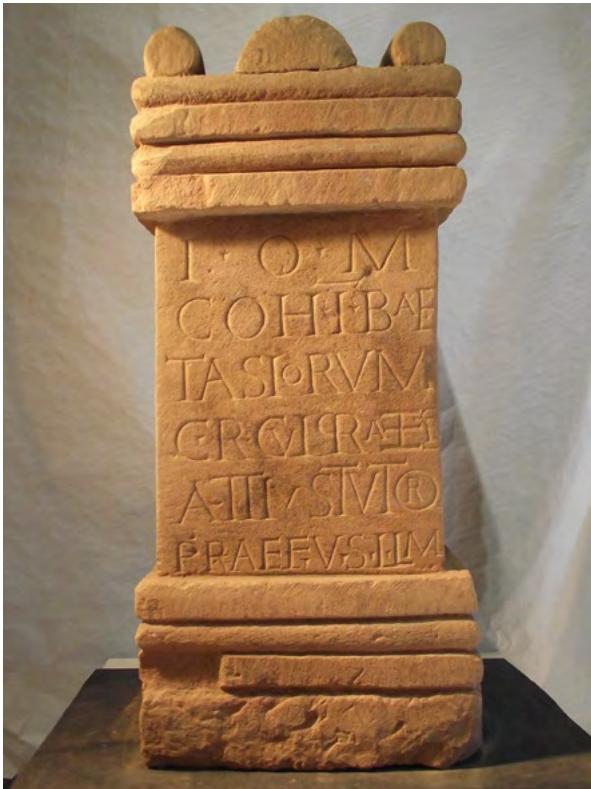


Figure 93 Altar to T. Attius Tutor from Maryport, Cumbria. Second or third century AD. Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport. (Photo: Ian Haynes and the Senhouse Roman Museum).

Figure 94 The silver Corbridge lanx from the River Tyne near Corbridge, Northumberland. Fourth century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).



more secure, contexts for the find-spots of the altars. One additional altar dedicated to Jupiter was recovered from a pit which, like the others related to a building. The majority of these altars were dedicated to Jupiter, by the various commanding officers of the First Cohort of Spaniards stationed here. They appear to have been dedicated annually, on January 3rd, and span the years of the emperor Hadrian's between AD 122 and his visit to Britain in that year and his death in AD 138. The example illustrated here, the new altar recovered in 2012, was dedicated by the prefect T. Attius Tutor (Figure 93). There are various differing theories as to the disposal of the altars. It has been suggested that each year as a new altar was dedicated the previous year's altar was ceremonially buried in a large pit. However, the new excavations in the area of the pits points to the idea that the pits are, or became, structural features, with the altars acting as basal supports for the load-bearing upright beams of a very large timber building. Were the altars used because they just happened to be there, set up side by side on a parade ground or marshalling point nearby? Or was there some kind of ideological purpose behind their use, linked to their religious function rather than simply their materiality as useful building stones?

The Corbridge silver *lanx*, a large, rectangular, shallow picture dish or plate (Figure 94), was found in the North Tyne in the eighteenth century and probably dates to the mid-fourth century AD, possibly to around AD 363, to the reign of Julian the Apostate. It is now in the collections of the British Museum in London. Such dishes are thought to have been religious items, serving to hold sacrificial meats perhaps as part of the overall rites at a particular temple, and certainly the iconography of the Corbridge *lanx* suggests just such a religious purpose for the plate, perhaps made commemmoratively to mark an imperial visit to the temple for which it was made.

The raised border of the dish is decorated with a running series of decorative vine tendrils, vine leaves, and bunches of grapes, while the main, flat area of the dish bears complex scenes relating to the worship of Apollo and other deities on the Greek island of Delos where he was meant to have been born. As well as Apollo himself, other figures represented include: Leto, daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe, and mother of Apollo and Artemis to Zeus; Asteria-Ortygia, sister of Leto; Artemis; and Athena. Underneath the main scene is a series of vignettes of a barking hound, a tree, a wounded stag, an altar, a griffon, and another, different kind of tree. Apollo is depicted standing within a small classical shrine, bow in hand and his lyre placed on the ground beside him. Three of the female deities, one of whom is seated on a small stool and is turned talking to Apollo, are in the forecourt of the shrine where an altar stands, appear to be awaiting the arrival of Artemis (Diana) who strides in from the right, bow in hand. A large tree in which sits a bird gives them shade.

It is generally thought that this vessel was but one vessel in a larger hoard, the rest of which has not been found, though a silver bowl with Chi Rho symbols on it found on another occasion nearby might well be part of the same treasure or hoard. Though



Figure 95 *The recognition of Ulysses/Odysseus*, a scene on a silver vessel fragment from Traprain Law, East Lothian, Scotland. Late fourth to fifth century AD. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

(Photo: National Museums of Scotland).

found in the River Tyne it is possible that it could have been buried in a pit on dry land on the river-banks that eventually was eroded away and crumbled into the water. Was this material buried as a monetary hoard or a treasure with religious significance for safe-keeping? Was it religious material disposed of ritually in a pit or *favissa*? Or were these silver items disposed of in the river as an act of dedication of the treasure as a religious *ex voto*? Finally, it needs to be asked whether the significance of the imagery on the Corbridge *lanx* helped dictate the nature of the second act which constituted its disposal, its afterlife?

Another of the great silver treasures of northern Britain is the Traprain Law Treasure from East Lothian in Scotland, dating to AD 350-450. This hoard of what archaeologists call hacksilver (from the German *hacksilber*) demonstrates how the circulation of Roman goods beyond the frontier of Roman Britain possibly included the circulation of images and ideas as well, though the material was cut up-'hacked'-rather than constituting whole items. Among the twenty three kilograms of silver were: a dish decorated with a large head of the bearded Hercules with his club; a flagon fragment with a satyr pursuing a nymph; a dish bearing an image of a Nereid on the back of a sea panther; the discovery or unmasking of Odysseus/Ulysses (Figure 95). Christian images included the temptation of Adam and Eve, Moses striking the rock to bring forth water, and the three wise men, along with Chi Rho crosses, fish symbols. Four very small *siliquae* coins help date the hoard, the latest of them being an issue of Honorius dated AD 397-402.

Had any of this material been selected because of the nature of the images and decoration on some of the vessels? Arguing against this is the fact that most of the material in the hoard when found at the site was much more badly damaged than would be apparent from seeing it on display in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh: some today might even consider the conservation work that took place on the material to have been over-restorative.

A much more recent and smaller *Hacksilber* hoard discovered by a metal detectorist from Dairsie, Fife in Scotland was notable for its perhaps deliberately-chosen burial place, in a location flanked on the one side by prehistoric standing stones and on the other by a peat bog.

The phenomenon of the bringing together of a significant group of artefacts or artworks in an act or rite of disposal or reuse in the Roman north is apparent from the examples discussed above, even though the context of reuse or disposal in each case was site-specific and unique. The significance of the creation of a second life or an afterlife for other groups of items such as the Newstead pit group assemblages and the Inchtuthil cache of iron nails was highlighted in previous chapters. Discussion could be further extended perhaps by including analysis of the items from the Backworth Treasure, Northumberland (dedicated to the *Matres* or Mother Goddesses by Fabius Dubitatus it includes a silver skillet, a mirror, gold chains, a bracelet, inscribed ring, three signet rings, all inset with nicolos, two bearing devices of a roast fowl and corn ears); the High Torrs, Wigtownshire, Scotland cremation burial of a soldier (containing weapons, pottery, rings, and a nicolo intaglio with Minerva carved on it); and even an assemblage of engraved gemstones from the sewer within the fortress at York (two carrying images of Mars, and others of Fortuna conflated with Minerva and Victory, Roma, and Aequitas).

A deconstruction of the terms used by archaeologists to categorise a number of objects or artworks found, used, or brought together: a group, a series, a collection, an assemblage, a hoard and so on is not intended here, nor are these terms necessarily always pejorative. Again, in trying to explain the afterlife of items such as those discussed above terms such as removal, disposal, destruction, iconoclasm, hoarding, concealment, treasure, and votive deposit are useful but often inadequate when dealing with such evident complexity.

If it is accepted that some of these instances of careful and considered disposal of material items and artworks in the Roman north represented manifestations of a form of collective forgetting, then it will be worth assessing how many forms such a process could have taken and can take. Removal of an item deletes it as a present object, though it may well have left behind some kind of visible or evidential trace by the very process of removal itself. Focusing, or rather refocusing, emphasises one of a group of objects or individual elements or characteristics of that group, in such a way that other objects in the group fade or fall out of vision and perhaps out of memory. Thirdly, and finally, replacement or substitution of one object with another can call into question sequence and memory.

These were all deliberate acts: the end result of a chain of decisions and of the making of choices. The motivations for instigating processes of collective forgetting would have been varied and sometimes overlapping or contiguous. Most obvious

perhaps is the explicit renunciation of memories which threatened or contradicted a contemporary narrative and thus somehow threatened the internal peace. Memories can be substituted for earlier memories. Mythical memories can be created, cultivated or developed. Taboo status can be conferred on problematic memories. Finally, there is the functionally and context-dependant prioritisation of one memory over another, usually for ideological purposes.

Today, the Roman presence in Scotland and the major task of building a frontier here can be viewed as simply being part of the continuum of Scottish history, an event anchored very specifically in time. When the frontier was abandoned, however, we need to consider the deep psychological impact that these events probably had and that the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs, with their potent imagery and symbolic value, were required to be disposed of to ameliorate that blow and to provide some kind of psychic closure.

Soft Power

After concentrating so much on the potent power of more major artworks in this study, some brief consideration also needs to be given to the effects of ‘soft power’ messaging, the decoration of samian ware vessels circulating in the Roman north and types of glass vessels favoured there. Was pottery and glass decoration noticed at all? Were pottery and glass vessel forms appreciated on aesthetic terms?

While pottery was made to be used, it was also made in some cases to be appreciated and, in the case of decorated Arretine and Samian pottery (*terra sigillata*) to be looked at and for its decorative motifs to be viewed, read and understood as cultural signifiers. Purely as an illustration of the vast range of decorative motifs that were employed on their vessels by the samian potters of Gaul I have decided to consider as an example the decorated samian assemblage from the 1970s-1980s excavations at the site of Binchester Roman fort, near Bishop Auckland in County Durham, as catalogued by Felicity Wild in my published final report on these campaigns of work. I could have selected any major northern fort site to illustrate the diverse nature of motifs employed and the sophistication of the visual and cultural knowledge of the pottery designers but I am most familiar with the Binchester material. These vessels were items produced outside the region and imported there, but the consumption of these items, both from a practical, utilitarian point of view and in terms of the viewing of their decorative schemes, was very much part of the region’s overall visual culture, as it would have been at any of the region’s centres where samian was used.

Incidental, filler decoration included motifs such as ovolos, trailing vine tendrils, acanthus leaves, leaf tips, buds, astragali, poppy heads, trifid buds, gadroons, festoons, garlands, rosettes, chevron wreathes, scrolls, saltires, medallions, arcading and columns, a *cornucopia*, and a decorative cross. More developed, figural motifs included

figures of a number of classical deities such as Neptune, three images of Apollo either standing or seated, two or possibly three images of Diana the huntress with her bow, owls, probably as symbols of Minerva, a muscley naked figure holding a wreath, possibly Hercules, and two images of the winged personification Victory holding a wreath. Mythological figures included cupids or *putti*, satyrs, including one holding a dead hare, a maenad, and the She-Wolf suckling the twins Romulus and Remus. Imperial or legionary eagles appeared on one vessel. Arena gladiatorial games and staged animal combats were well represented by images such as a charioteer, pairs of gladiators in combat, lions, two instances of a lion devouring a man, a bear attacking a captive or convict who is being held by the hair by a larger figure behind him, presumably a staged execution of some kind, a panther, figures possibly leaping over a bull in the arena, as discussed more fully and illustrated in Chapter Six, a man with a spear in combat with a panther, a man in combat with a lion, and pairs of figures carrying items of some kind, these men perhaps being involved in a sacrificial rite of some kind in the arena. Other human figures included a single sacrificer, a draped woman with covered head, and a standing armed male figure, with a theatrical mask on one vessel alluding to a stage performer. Animals, both real and mythological, the natural world, and hunting were very well represented by hares, hares being chased by hounds, stags, stags and deer being chased by hounds through a scrubby landscape marked by bushes, grass tufts, or sometimes stylised trees in which birds are perched, pairs of running hounds, birds including Nile geese and Egyptian storks, a boar, a sea creature of some sort, and a griffon. An image on one pot of a small open-fronted, roofed building, was presumably a representation of a rustic shrine.

All glass vessels in the north were imports, certainly the best quality ones, and though it might have been expected that some of the more utilitarian vessels were made locally, particularly those relating to army needs, there is only evidence of some, probably small-scale, glassmaking from one site in the region, the fort at Binchester. While decorated glass vessels were less ubiquitous, nevertheless certain trends in the consumption of these vessels, above and beyond simply their functionality, can be discerned in the north. In an earlier chapter mention has already been made of the splendid painted glass vessel with images of gladiators on it from Vindolanda, and the opportunity will be taken now to consider two other types of glass vessels imported into northern Britain. Fragments of glass from decorated mould-blown glass vessels of Flavian date have been found on a number of northern sites, that is York, Roecliffe, Binchester, Carlisle, Vindolanda, Corbridge, South Shields and, most northerly at Camelon in Scotland. Fragments of twenty five different vessels have come from these eight sites, including decorated cylindrical cups, convex bowls, ovoid beakers, conical beakers, and so-called head-beakers in the form of an African male head. The cylindrical cups from York and Carlisle carry chariot racing scenes, from different moulds, though the racing scenes are very similar indeed, being in the form of a figural frieze topped by an inscribed band of charioteers' names around the circumference of the top part of the cup. Racers in *quadriga* or four-horse chariots have around the

cups, one driver depicted holding the reigns of the straining equine teams, another brandishing the whip, one rider holding the victor's wreath: some of the architecture of the hippodrome is also portrayed. Two African head-beakers are represented by a large dark blue sherd from South Shields, whose provenance has at one time been questioned, and four fragments from Camelon in Scotland, again in dark blue glass but derived from a distinctly-different mould pattern.

But were these vessels personal possessions or traded goods? Certainly, the chariot race cups must be considered as personal possessions brought to the region by their owners, as they must have been souvenirs of specific race events either attended by their owners in Italy or events at which their owner's preferred team out of the four circus factions—the Reds, Whites, Blues, and Greens—had done particularly well or at which one of their favoured drivers, as named on the vessel, had taken the winner's wreath the most. Such vessels are not common in Roman Britain as a whole and so three finds in the north are of interest. The African head-beakers are rarer still in the province, only being known from three or four other sites outside the north. No matter what we might think of such pieces today, at the time these were probably viewed as novelty items alluding to the presence of black African household servants or bath attendants in Rome and other parts of Italy.

There are a number of other glass vessels from the north which are of considerable interest. Very high quality cut-glass tablewares are not common in the region, with only nine examples so far recorded (up to 2010). Their presence on a particular site should be taken as an indicator of the presence there of a high-status individual or individuals who might have brought the vessels with them or who were in some way involved in a formal, political gift exchange. It is now generally accepted that gift-giving in the late Roman period was a form of diplomatic soft power that usually involved items made of precious metals, items made of luxury materials such as ivory or amber, precious stones and jewellery, and, of course, coins. The occasion for gift giving could involve the commemoration of an imperial anniversary, a political or magistracy appointment, promotion, and so on, and, of course, it could also involve the giving of gifts to elite individuals beyond the frontiers of the empire. Using this template of possibilities it has been suggested by Jenny Price that the unusual and high-quality individual glass vessels found at Binchester (a bowl with a male figure in a tunic on one fragment), Vindolanda (decorated beakers), South Shields (bowls with facet cut designs), and Chesters (two bowls, one with a hunting scene and the other with a harvesting scene) were most likely gifts made to high-ranking army officers and administrators stationed at those sites and the outlier of this group, that is the presence of such a vessel at the tribal centre of Traprain Law in Scotland, was more likely to have been a diplomatic gift. This vessel, a colourless bowl with figured cutting, is fragmentary, but on one sherd can be seen a female head, perhaps of a goddess. Less easy to explain is the presence of part of an exquisite Egyptian polychrome mosaic bowl with floral designs on it from the rural villa site of Ingleby Barwick, Stockton-

on-Tees, North Yorkshire, unless the site represented the modest retirement home of a rewarded soldier or bureaucrat.

To conclude, in this chapter I have chosen to explore the idea that just as the context of a work of art in the Roman period can be recreated in terms of what it can tell us about production, consumption, and identity at the time, so can the context of the item's disposal, reuse, or disuse be examined in a similar way, often revealing negative feelings, stresses, and anxieties at the moments of change. It has been argued by Peter Stewart, amongst others, that in some cases art objects in Roman Britain might have been viewed or perceived as significant because of their innate qualities—their physicality, their materiality, their monumentality in certain cases, and their permanence—rather than necessarily by reason of any images or inscriptions that they carried. Yet ideas of visual culture and permanence seem to have been inextricably linked in the many case studies presented here to illustrate the process of the death, rebirth, or recreation of certain groups of specific artworks and artefacts in northern Roman Britain. Northern Roman Britain provides a perhaps surprisingly large number of instances in which recontextualisation of artworks took place. To slightly paraphrase Nietzsche, ‘forgetfulness’ at this time would seem to have been the latent ‘property of all’ art, rather than of all ‘action’, as he insisted.

Chapter Nine

A Landscape of Possibilities

While in the previous chapters I have considered religious, military, and gendered identities as reflected and represented in specific artworks created or consumed in the northern region in the Roman period and have contrasted the use of different media to personate those identities, in this chapter an attempt will be made to look more thematically and discursively at the material.

Locale

These Romano-British artworks were very much about themselves or about the medium of art itself in some senses because what they did was reveal, demonstrate, question, and argue for a particular position on an ideological issue. This book has proposed a means of looking at certain artworks in northern Roman Britain as having operated beyond what appeared to be their genre or their narrative, in that they can be thought to have been reflecting upon themselves. These artworks would appear to have asserted geography and chronology as their principal organisational concept. Oblivion and rescue were at best myopic tropes that served to define the later history of many of the artworks discussed in this study. As a body of works they appear to me endowed with a vivid, even epic, quality which somehow helps render them unique. The art of the northern region remains a reflecting glass in which we can see so much of Roman Britain and of the Roman world more broadly.

The Roman empire created entirely new markets and commodified things that were never historically objects of transactions, but that did not apply to art, even if the types and categories of art synonymous with Roman culture were alien to pre-invasion Britain. Romano-British art in the north was no longer part of a culture of particular privilege: rather, it was an art that privileged locality and temporality. It was both of *the moment* and outside *the moment*, but most certainly of *the place*.

A considerable number of artworks and objects from northern Britain directly reflected the geology and natural resources of the region, its very materiality in other words, these of course being the hundreds of statuary pieces and sculptures carved in the various local stone types and those decorated objects made from Whitby and east coast jet and shale.

There is very little Romano-British art from the northern study area directly portraying landscape, but a great deal of art that would appear to be ultimately *about* landscape and the physical environment of the north, a kind of rumination on the natural environment, with its distinctive countryside, uplands, and rivers. Such discrete interventions led to transmissions still perceivable, even as the terrain has changed



Figure 96 A bronze of a ploughing team from Piercebridge, County Durham. First-third century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

or indeed in some areas actually vanished. Looking at art as an expression of identity, as a reflection of it, or as a response to it, need not exclude considering identity as usually needing a locus. In fact identity expressed through art sometimes acted as a way of stating humanity in the wilderness. Both visual and mental landscapes can be symbolic in their resonances.

The two key sites in the Roman north with artworks that illustrate this point are Coventina's Well at Carrawburgh and the Shrine to Vinotonus on Scargill Moor, County Durham. Scenes of agriculture are virtually absent from the art of the region, perfectly understandable in a frontier zone where bucolic thoughts were channelled towards the ideal as an escape from a sometimes-dangerous reality, or from military drudgery and routine, with the notable exception of the first to third century AD bronze plough team figurine from Piercebridge, County Durham (Figure 96), now in the British Museum, London. The act of ploughing was not only significant in the Roman world because of its role in the cultivation of land and the production of crops, but also because of its links to the foundation of the city of Rome itself. Many Roman writers described the symbolic ploughing of the bounds of the city by Romulus and how a formal ritual of ploughing came to accompany the rites carried out during the foundation or refoundation of a town. Thus it is difficult to know whether the Piercebridge bronze of a hooded man guiding a plough-team of a bull and a cow ploughing a furrow is simply a genre piece or if it had a more loaded, symbolic, or even religious significance. The exchange of information was the foundation of the Roman artistic lexicon but such a transfer of knowledge could only have taken place if the image was easy to understand and interpret, and could only be considered knowledge if someone outside found value in it.

Throughout this book it will have been apparent that in the Roman north images and texts melted into each other, edged with northern mists. They did not cease to be individual as they blended in to each other and the natural world. In this ancient landscape it was the shifting balance between water and land that gave the year its rhythm. This was a landscape of sight, sound, and recollection represented by memory. To fathom its meaning and get close to some kind of definition we need to question preconceptions about the nature of Romano-British art as simply a provincial art, and art in northern Roman Britain as just a sub-set of that. Connectivity was only realised through the local responses to broader connective networks. In the Roman world there were everywhere, even in Italy, strong tendencies towards regionalism or even localism. Art in the Roman north often invoked nature's associations of fecundity, earthiness, process, growth, and decay. It understood the power of place, the sense that topography and culture were inextricably intertwined. Landmarks could be topographical as well as chronological. These new surroundings were often best understood and navigated in relation to familiar places and familiar strategies for representing such places or landscape features.

It has been argued that art was centrally concerned with the value of change to reflect historical circumstances, as weighed against the cultural merits and comfort of consistency. Of course, you cannot treat material remains as being representative of broad historical processes. While northern Romano-British art might be thought to have been focused on dissolving the confines of identity, on the contrary it seems to have acted as a mode for its transmission. Art with geographical connotations helped the Romans stake a claim here in the north. It stressed the importance of physical movement such as traversing the landscape as being part of the process of creating meaning through art.

The number of inscriptions from the north is also greater than that from the south of the province, a phenomenon that can mainly be attributed to the role played by the epigraphic habit in the culture of the Roman army. However, other factors may have contributed towards this bias. If we understand the Latin language in the form of inscriptions as the living code that connected contemporary humanity here in the north to stone and water, then in this way names, stories, and places came to consume the cultural imagination of the region's inhabitants. The miracle of the collected assembly of inscriptions and artworks from the north combined topography, language, geology, myth, and images in such a way as to draw attention to the local, and by doing so to invite wonder at the broader region. Where the public body of history encountered the private spaces of desire and loss these emotional landscapes were parsed by the probing of silences, by the deconstructing of the familiar. Desire was here a search for what was possible. Presence and absence were equally of value. Indeed, it has already been noted that apart from their individual meanings the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs represented just such a series with further meaning: they both plotted and recorded a journey across a landscape.

Many of these northern artworks were objects *for* a landscape, each individual work a fragment of a broader imagination and experience, often expressed and realised in a number of closely-related forms. It would appear that space itself was after all just another material that could be transformed and moulded into an artwork, depending on the needs and desires of the commissioners of the works and on context. This allowed for an infinite number of possibilities in terms of imagery, form, material, and media.

Travel across the northern landscapes will have transformed both what members of the Roman army knew and, most importantly, how they thought. Contemplating the landscape led to the representing of exterior shapes and motions in the form of images by magnifying distortions. Roman cartographers and surveyors were engaged in the process of guiding perceptions and not simply representing any kind of objective reality. Their maps and the interior mapping of their lived experiences embodied political and moral relativism through how they depicted three-dimensional worlds in two dimensions, and how images were employed as aides in coming to terms with conceptualising a new and different environment. As undoubtedly only a small portion of the artworks created or consumed in the Roman north of Britain have come down to us it cannot be proven statistically that the few topographical allusions in this art were to imperial legitimacy and familial legacy: nevertheless there are hints in the chronological clustering of such works in the second and third centuries AD that this might have indeed have been the case.

Uniquely though for Roman Britain parts of the second century AD natural and built landscape of the north was in fact celebrated or commemorated in art, by the production of enamelled copper alloy vessels-variously called pans or skillets by archaeologists-which portrayed Hadrian's Wall in a schematic and heavily-stylised fashion, as discussed in Chapter Six. The number of these vessels so far found is small, but, even so, three types of variation of such vessels can be recognised. Firstly there are pans which bear enamelled decoration portraying in a highly-stylised manner either parts of the crenellated linear wall itself or sections of the curtain walls and gates of individual forts, accompanied by a list of names of forts in the western sector of the wall cast in relief as part of the overall process of the casting of the vessel before its enamelling. This first category is represented by the Rudge Cup (found near Froxfield, Wiltshire in the 1720s) and the Amiens Patera (found in 1949 in Amiens, Picardy, France). Secondly there is a vessel type on which appears enamelled decoration in the form of vegetal scrolls and swirls accompanied by fort names, again curiously only in the western sector of the wall, which have been incised above the decorated zone rather than being cast in relief as part of the vessel's original creation, as in the first category of souvenir vessels. This second category is represented solely by the Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan (found in 2003 by metal detectorists at Ilam, Staffordshire). The third vessel type bears enamel decoration very similar to the stylised crenellated walling of the first category but crucially appears without any

accompanying relief inscription or incised inscription giving fort names. This third type is represented by the Bath Pan (found in the pool around the Sacred Spring in the Roman baths) and what is known as the Hildburgh fragment (found in northern Spain, between Zamora and León, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

The dating of individual pans and of the three types is a matter of debate among archaeologists. Some place the Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan as the earliest in the series because of its composite form—that is with a band of inscription of fort names added to a pre-existing vessel. The two vessels with cast relief inscriptions and stylised walling, that is the Rudge Cup and the Amiens *Patera*, are more likely to be later it is argued, perhaps of a date in the second half of the second century AD when Hadrian's Wall was refurbished, with the turf wall being rebuilt in stone. However, it appears more logical that the Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan is actually later than the pans with cast inscriptions and that the fort names were added to the Ilam Pan to copy the others. A later second century AD date seems to me appropriate for all three of the inscribed pans with fort names.

I would argue that rather than simply being a decorative design the vegetal scrolling on the Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan represents a stylised design of plants and trees, the wild natural landscape and topography of the Roman north, the landscape around the wall. The band of incised fort names in the register above the vegetal motifs represents the Roman military built-environment imposed upon, and disrupting, this landscape. So this souvenir of the north appears to celebrate and bring to mind the underlying natural environment and not the superimposed Roman built-environment as represented by the wall, the forts, and the other infrastructural elements of the frontier works. This would fit in to a pattern that has gradually emerged throughout this book of a trend for some artworks to depict elements of the built-environment, either contemporary or imagined, and for others to depict forest or wild animals. This visual dialogue would seem to have been a theme of life in the Roman north, and formed part of the broader ideological and cultural discourses that centred around life on the frontier: perhaps for some the reflection of the reality of being a stranger in a strange land. Although the enamelled vessel from somewhere near Linlithgow, West Lothian in Scotland is also decorated profusely with trailing vegetal and floriform motifs it bears no inscription, but it still appears possible that such a design, even without fort names, was meant to invoke the northern landscape in the viewer's mind. Indeed, it could be further argued that the enamelling technique itself and the broader, earlier Celtic art schemes that these vegetal designs harked back to were also part and parcel of a programme to represent a sense of place and a sense of tradition, but a tradition open to new influences and creative adaption.

None of these pans has been found in the north itself, but it is more than likely that they were manufactured there. The fact that these vessels have been found at locations in the south of the province, obviously well away from the wall, and in one

case outside the province, in Gaul, might imply that they were souvenirs of some kind, each representing either a sojourn on the wall for a soldier, or a visit to the wall region by a private individual for some purpose. They would appear both to have represented a need to record, and thereby somehow control, the landscape of the north by turning it into an image, almost a map, and a desire to take that image away from its home territory in order to invoke its physicality and being elsewhere. This represents a curious phenomenon which could have a number of explanations. It is surely rather more than a remarkable coincidence that the three enamelled souvenir pans that bear fort names all bear names of forts in the western sector of Hadrian's Wall. It has been suggested that there might have been sets of such vessels, and that pans with eastern sector fort names did exist as parts of those sets, but that eastern sector name vessels have not yet been found. It could have been that the eastern sector of the wall was a much more restricted area for security reasons and that 'souvenirs' of visits to forts here were not produced for this reason.

Small enamels of this size and form, without the images of parts of the wall and names of individual forts on, are generally accepted as having been used in religious rites in Roman Britain, to pour libations of water or wine. Ralph Jackson has pointed out that the Rudge Cup was recovered from a well associated with a Roman building, that the Amiens *Patera* came from a possible shrine associated with a bath building, and that the Ilam or Staffordshire Moorlands Pan was found in an area where the River Manifold disappears underground for parts of its course, thus linking each of these three pans with some kind of watery place, natural in one case and man-made in the two others. If a linking theme between these vessels and their place of sale was water, then it needs to be questioned as to whether they could have been used in religious rituals at certain locations on the wall and then taken away as a token of that particular interaction between an individual and their god or goddess, as a symbol of the vow. That would not have precluded their further use in religious rites at other sites away from the north subsequently. Indeed it might have been a way to invoke a local northern god or goddess associated with water outside of their usual and specific territory of operation. It was demonstrated in Chapter Three that certain northern regional Romano-Celtic deities such as Antenociticus, Coventina, and Cocidius had an alluring pull for many members of the Roman military stationed there.

These decorated pans have been called 'the first souvenirs' in a publication to accompany an exhibition of three of these vessels. While this might to some extent be true for Roman Britain it is not for other parts of the empire. There was a series of glass vessels bearing images of oyster farms produced in both Baiae and Puteoli in central southern Italy for people visiting the famous fisheries there. Nor is it the only instance in which we have evidence of a journey made in the ancient world recorded or commemorated in some way.



Figure 97 Decorated silver patera handle from Capheaton, Northumberland. Second to third century AD. British Museum, London. (Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum).

What little discussion there has been about the reception of Hadrian's Wall has tended to begin with antiquarian images of the remains of the wall and its infrastructure. Yet it is these pans that represent an expression of, and a reaction to, the earliest visual experiences of the Wall, and not the prints associated with the first antiquarian explorations here. They allow us to get from description to explanation by thinking through contrasts. It is paradoxical that they make the monument more real and yet more abstract at the same time. Contemplation of them allows us to explore the interaction of representations of power, as symbolised by the wall, with a numinous landscape layered with meaning. The inter-relationship of images and their labels here is important. The ability of the texts to make these images speak to the viewer, to direct the visual imagery, was crucial. Sometimes when text and image appeared together text seemed to dictate the possibilities of directionality over images.

Mention was made in an earlier chapter of Martin Henig's interesting and acute observation that images of sacro-idyllic landscapes were common on Roman engraved gemstones from the region, and probably somehow significant when considered together. It has also been noted throughout this book that similar idealised landscapes also appeared occasionally on other works of art, on the Capheaton silver *patera* handle for instance (Figure 97) and on the silver Corbridge *lanx*. Usually this imagined landscape was a tamed, peaceful landscape, this point often being emphasised by the presence in the landscape of a classical building, normally a rustic shrine or a temple. A small rustic shrine was even an occasionally-employed stamped motif on samian pottery, one example from the north having been found at Binchester.

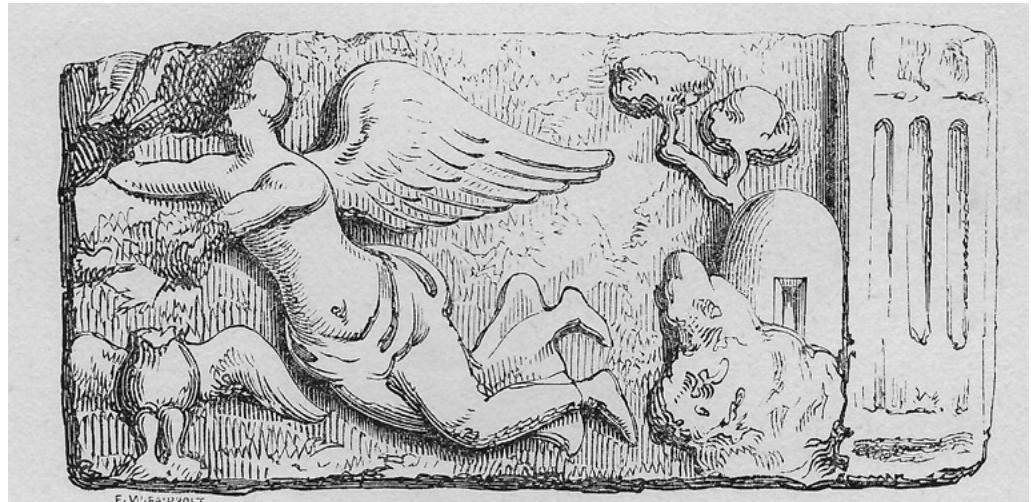


Figure 98 The Rose Hill relief, from Gilsland, Cumbria, possibly depicting Arthur's O'on, pictured on a nineteenth century woodcut by F.W. Fairholt. Original, now-weathered stone in a private collection at Castletown House, Rockcliffe, Cumbria. (Photo: David Breeze).



Figure 99 Detail on an altar to Disciplina from Birrens, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. Antonine. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Photo: Author).

Figure 100 Tombstone of an optio from Chester; detail of image of a building or funerary garden. Early third century AD. Grosvenor Museum, Chester. (Photo: Author).

A number of other portrayals of classical buildings come from the region, each being part of what would appear to have been a statement about the civilising power of *Romanitas* and its mission to colonise and tame wild territory. Such works include, for example: the Rose Hill relief (Figure 98) that depicts a large, possibly triumphal monument which might have been the structure known as Arthur's O'on in its landscape setting, as discussed more fully below; the Bridgeness legionary distance slab which juxtaposes an image of sacrifice outside a classical shrine with a scene of bloody conflict with barbarians; the Hutcheson Hill legionary distance slab which places bound, tamed barbarians inside a temple with images of Victory; and a relief from the *Dolichenum* at Corbridge on which the Dioscuri appear outside a colonnaded building. Other artworks in this group include: a mid-second century AD altar from Birrens, Dumfriesshire in Scotland dedicated to *Disciplina* by the Second Cohort of Tungrians, on the upper part of which is depicted a classical building of some kind (Figure 99); a relief from the shrine to *Roma Aeterna* at Corbridge covered in trailing ivy or vines; an uninscribed relief from Maryport depicting a naked goddess, presumably Venus, standing in the arched side entranceway of a massive stone gatehouse with a double-portal gate with an upper storey pierced by windows; and, again from Maryport, a damaged relief of three naked goddesses or nymphs, each standing under an arched recess inside a temple building.

On the bottom part of a second or third century AD grave stele of a military *optio* from Chester who is recorded by the inscription as having died in a shipwreck, is depicted an elaborate stone tomb, or possibly a temple, set in a funerary garden as represented by shrub-like plants or small trees (Figure 100). A now-lost fragment of a second or third century AD relief from near Rudchester, Northumberland carries a depiction of the facade of a temple or a high-walled tumulus or burial mound.

Mention was made in an earlier chapter about a number of glass vessels found in the north whose decoration included images which would also fit into this category of landscape depiction as a means of stimulating contemplation, and of the cosmic trans-substantiation of real landscape to imagined, idyllic landscape. These include two vessels from Chesters and, perhaps, the very rare fourth century AD Egyptian polychrome mosaic bowl from the villa at Quarry Farm, Ingleby Barwick, North Yorkshire. The Chesters vessel fragments carry partial depictions of a man on horseback, probably a hunting scene, and of a figure, part of whose head only survives, standing among plants, perhaps a harvesting scene. Thus we are possibly seeing here images of the taming and exploitation of the land through farming, and the use of wild terrain for the elite late Roman leisure pursuit of hunting. The decoration on the three recovered sherds of the Quarry Farm bowl consists of an almost impressionistic rendering of flower heads, with a corolla of blue petals and a yellow centre and green stems. Such exotic flowers would have been quite unlike anything that grew in the Roman north of Britain.

The possibility that the natural northern landscape was rendered in coloured enamel on the Hadrian's Wall souvenir pans has already been discussed. Vegetal decoration also appears on sculptural works as well, sometimes on its own, and sometimes accompanied by images of birds or animals. A fragment of an Antonine relief from Laurieston, near Mumrills on the Antonine Wall in Scotland is decorated with a vertical, leafy branch, and an Antonine altar to Minerva from Birrens, also in Scotland, has trailing ivy tendrils over the left and right faces of the capital, shaft and base, accompanying the altar's primary decoration of pairs of dolphins and ravens, and birds. A crane and a crane with a chick appear on the sides of the shaft of a third century AD altar to Jupiter from the *praetorium* at Vindolanda (and as incidental decoration on a second century AD Risingham dedication slab to the *Numina Augustorum*) and on part of a decorated stone window arch from the Severan *praetorium* at Housesteads, the cranes or storks on the latter stone pecking at trailing vegetal tendrils.

It can even be suggested that the trope of displaying landscape settings also had a continued resonance, and some kind of emotional currency, in a Christian context in the north, as represented by the image of sheep in a wooded landscape on one of the Traprain Law silver vessels and by the tree of life and peacocks motif on the copper alloy belt plate from Stanwick.

Another artistic trope which might have conveyed the same message is that of an animal passing through a forest or a wooded landscape. Examples include the base of a second or third century AD altar from Risingham, on which a large bull walks through a wood represented by six stylised trees. On a mid-second century AD altar from Bankshead Milecastle near Birdoswald, dedicated to the local god Cocidius by soldiers of the Twentieth Legion, a boar is depicted amid trees. If it is accepted that the Bankshead boar was not a wild beast in a primeval forest, but rather the emblem of the Twentieth Legion, then the bull on the Risingham altar might well have been the emblem of the Sixth Legion. We have only to think of how images of oak or other deciduous trees were used as a pictorial shorthand for the northern lands of either Britain or Germany on the battle frieze from the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and of Dacia on the decorated helical frieze around Trajan's Column to interpret these seemingly simple scenes. In each case the trees represented untamed northern British landscapes and the animals represented the civilising power of the Roman army and state. This would seem to have been part of something quite profound: it was as if the image of the plant was declaring its own place in the contemporary world.

A decorated altar of the second or third century AD, again from Risingham, is dedicated jointly to Cocidius, a local or regional Romano-Celtic martial and hunting deity, and to Silvanus, a Classical deity associated with hunting and wild places. Now damaged, on the front of the capital of the altar appears an image of Cocidius holding a bow, with a quiver of arrows slung over his shoulder. In the corners are stylised trees, indicating that the hunt is in, or on, the fringes of a wooded landscape. He stands between a

small running stag on his left and a hunting dog sitting attentively on his right. On one side of the capital are images of a doe and young buck and a tree once more. An axe and knife, jug and *patera* on the altar shaft sides are standard images referencing sacrifice.

Two reliefs depicting hunting scenes, from Castlecary and Jarrow, are of great interest in this respect. A sculptured panel with relief carving from Castlecary, Stirlingshire in Scotland dates to the Antonine period. Thought to possibly be from a shrine or temple outside the fort, the Castlecary relief image is of a hunting scene in a wooded landscape. The stone is uninscribed. At the centre of the scene are depicted two stags jousting with antlers locked together. To the left of them can be seen a small male figure dressed in a tunic and billowing cloak, with a pointed hat on his head. He holds a bow and advances stealthily towards the rutting stags through a wood. On the right side can be seen a second hunter holding a spear and approaching from the opposite direction to the Bowman. These two figures were doubtless local or regional hunter deities. It is surely significant that not only are they operating in the local landscape but the figures of the gods by their positioning on the flanks of the relief scene appear almost subsidiary to the image of the rutting and competing stags, in this case probably a powerful metaphor for the forces of nature. The Jarrow relief dates to the second or third century AD and carries a depiction of a hunter with a bow approaching a stag from behind, and firing an arrow at him from close quarters. The male figure, presumably again a local hunter god, is clad in a similar tunic and cap to one of the figures on the Castlecary relief.

A second or third century AD relief from Housesteads carries a depiction of a deer walking towards a gridded motif which probably represents a hunter's net. An uninscribed altar of roughly the same date from Vindolanda is decorated with images of a stag running towards a tree and two fawns grazing in a lightly-wooded clearing: it has been suggested that this could have been dedicated to Diana or to a local hunter deity. A heavily-antlered stag moves towards a tree on a third century AD relief slab, possibly from a tomb, at Chester.

Attention now needs to be turned to the sculpture of a large bearded male deity (Figure 101) recovered by excavation from the bath suite of the commandant's house at Chesters Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall. The long-haired reclining figure has a bare upper torso, with the rest of his body covered by a draped garment of some kind. A mask of a similarly-bearded, long-haired male sits by his left elbow. There is nothing in the way of attributes to suggest that this is an image of the god Neptune, though such an image would have been entirely appropriate to a bath house setting, and the general consensus among academics is that the figure is a river god, probably in this context the personification of the North Tyne that flows nearby. It has been suggested that this particular statue could have been one of a series of such images that adorned the nearby massive Roman stone bridge over the river and that it was subsequently



Figure 101 Statue of a river god from Chesters, Northumberland. Second or third century AD. Chesters Museum. (Photo: John Boyd-Brent).

taken off that structure for some reason and repurposed in the bath house. This is an attractive idea, but one for which there is presently no supporting evidence. Dated to the second century AD, though it could in fact be as late as the early third century, the Tyne river god is quite literally an image created to evoke the northern environment, more allusively portrayed on many other sculptural works from the region, as suggested above. Given that northern Britain was a frontier region it is highly likely, that the importance placed by the Romans in rivers was not just related to their status as landscape features, but also to their prescriptive role as natural boundaries, and thus as potentially-important defensive features, their existence and courses being integral to the planning and construction of frontier works.

The concept of the personification of a natural physical feature in human form had its origins in Greek art, but Roman personification was to some extent more complex. Images of rivers, including personified images, were common, among a plethora of visual motifs, used for illustrative purposes and as a trope in Roman imperial triumphs. In such contexts they came to represent the conquered lands in which they flowed and, by extension, the conquered peoples of those lands. As an illustration of this complexity one can consider the Roman poet Ovid in his *Tristia* of AD 10-11 where he describes a fictional triumphal procession to celebrate and memorialise victory over the Germans at which he ventriloquises the reactions of a bystander on the processional route who declares that a personified statue representing the River Rhine was discoloured by staining from its own shed blood, as if the river could somehow be wounded like a man or woman and bleed. Water was thought by some in the Roman world to represent some kind of freedom and self-dissolution, indeed as a way of making contact with the past and with what were thought to have been earlier, simpler stages of life. The flow of water in rivers was sometimes conflated with ideas and thoughts about time, memory, and intuition.

Personifications of the River Nile were quite common in Roman art, and a topographical portrayal of the river's various stretches from source to mouth most famously appears



Figure 102 Relief of Neptune and Nymphs from Housesteads. Second or third century AD. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

on the staggering early second century AD Nile Mosaic from Palestrina near Rome. The image of the personification of the River Danube on the lower register of the decorated helical frieze around Trajan's Column in Rome echoes a fondness for the portrayal of similar personifications of this great river on a number of coin issues under Trajan. The Nile, the Tiber, the Rhine, and the Euphrates all appeared as named personifications on certain coin issues between the reigns of Hadrian and Constantine. It is possible, though I think unlikely, that one or both of the unnamed river gods (or marine deities) on a Hadrianic coin issue and one of Septimius Severus could also be personifications of the Tyne, given the particular links of both emperors to military activity in northern Britain.

The Romans in the north also needed to appease the wild North Sea, the east coast shipping routes being vital for the region's, and indeed the province's, economy. It is not surprising therefore that a now-fragmentary relief of Neptune and an impressive, large relief of Neptune and the Nymphs (Figure 102), possibly from a fountain, have both been found at Housesteads. Both date to the second or third century AD. The latter image is of the seated god propped up against an aquatic plant. He holds a dolphin in one hand and a trident in the other. Two of the three accompanying nymphs hold a *patera* in one hand. Altars to Neptune of a similar date to these reliefs have been found at Birdoswald and Castlesteads, both in Cumbria and at such a remove from the North Sea that it might be thought instead that they were dedicated to the god to protect the western coastal sea route. An Antonine altar dedicated to the god comes from Castlecary, Stirlingshire, Scotland. The head of a horned, bearded god on a now-lost altar of the second or third century AD from Cramond, Midlothian, Scotland might just have been of Neptune. A pair of possibly Hadrianic altars found in the north channel of the River Tyne at Newcastle were dedicated to Neptune (Figure 103) in one



Figure 103 Altar to Neptune from the River Tyne at Newcastle. Possibly Hadrianic, or later. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).



Figure 104 Altar to Oceanus from the River Tyne at Newcastle. Possibly Hadrianic, or later. Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle. (Photo: Author).

instance and to Oceanus in the other (Figure 104). The front face of the Neptune altar carries an image of a trident entwined by a dolphin, while the Oceanus altar front is decorated with an image of an anchor. An image of Neptune also appeared alongside Victory and Mars on an early third century AD relief from Corbridge.

Another artwork from the northern frontier region which might through its imagery have alluded to the contemporary landscape setting comes from the site of Rose Hill on Hadrian's Wall. Today the dedicatory stone relief is heavily weathered and difficult to interpret. However, an illustrative woodcut by F.W. Fairholt of the stone as first found in the early nineteenth century, reproduced here (as Figure 98) as the original stone is somewhat unphotogenic, clearly portrays the central, large image of a semi-naked, winged Victory, with a military or imperial eagle in the foreground to one side. In the background on the left hand side of the stone can be seen a tree, a bush or thicket, a tall structure of some kind with a domed roof and entrance door, and a

second larger structure by its side. In the past, the domed structure has been variously interpreted as a native hut, despite its apparently large size, or a rural shrine of some sort. However, more recently David Breeze has suggested that this structure is in fact the monument known as Arthur's O'on (Arthur's Oven).

Arthur's O'on does not exist today, having been razed to the ground in the mid-eighteenth century. Sited a few kilometres to the north of the fort at Falkirk on the Antonine Wall in the central lowlands of Scotland the monument was visited and inspected by a number of antiquarians before its destruction, and their subsequent written accounts suggest that this was indeed a Roman-period monument, though its actual purpose was less clear to them.

David Breeze believes that Arthur's O'on was a Roman military victory monument set up to commemorate the successful campaign of either Agricola in Scotland in the first century AD, or of Lollius Urbicus in the mid-second century, or indeed of Septimius Severus in the early third century, and that it may well have originally been decorated with dedicatory inscriptions and appropriate commemorative artworks, something along the lines of the Trajanic Trophy monument, the *Tropaeum Traiani*, at Adamklissi in Romania, though not so grand or prestigious. While this might well have been the case, the antiquarian accounts of decorative stones seen at the monument before its destruction are somewhat contradictory. There might have been reliefs bearing imperial or legionary eagles, there might have been a winged Victory and military standards, and a now-lost bronze finger reported as allegedly being from the site might have been part of a life-size statue set up here. Perhaps Arthur's O'on was rightfully present in the Rose Hill relief because it could be reduced to a cipher here, emptied of specific meaning, indeed for its ability to suggest and represent endurance and longevity.

A Landscape of Memory

The implicit belief in the historical specificity of cultural practices and social behaviour would almost certainly seem to have had a regional dimension in Roman Britain. Using distance and attendant shifts of scale art in the north animated the geological and historical features of the landscape, providing us with an exploration of what it meant to be human in a remote place. Even those works which explored the human body were ultimately about its relationship to space, questioning what was the nature of the space these statues inhabited, what was the space where the body was. As archaeological objects, as relics, they represent the place where a human being once was and could be. In other words, it could be argued that the body in northern Roman art in some instances was to some extent simply a contained space: its presence would have had the effect of shifting attention from the intrinsic qualities of the sculptures to the context which contained them. Neither necessarily representations nor symbols they would have engaged the physical, perceptual, and imaginative responses of those

coming within their relational field. A statue in a forum is as much about the forum space itself as it is about its own materiality.

The moving forward of the frontier from Hadrian's Wall to the Antonine Wall was not only a logistical and engineering feat, but also required a conceptual leap in imagination which is reflected in the body of Antonine Wall artworks discussed earlier in Chapter Six. The isomorphic forms of these artworks appear to provide a grid of visible points of contact with those invisible and elemental forces that were moving through the frontier landscape at this time, and with massive political and ideological change and transition. Unlike anything from the earlier frontier they appear to possess an almost exultant, restless quality, at the same time both revealing and obscuring. That they were probably both provocative and insightful to contemporary viewers, reflecting a kind of anxiety, is surely not a matter for academic debate. Frontier artworks such as these should I believe be regarded as a form of philosophical reflection of some kind, and need to be considered as a mode of reflective thought rather than just as the presentation of a set of visual codes.

Portraying conflict brought forth a dark and turbulent form of image, but the way these images are interpreted is perhaps no different from the way they lived their lives, of how society then regulated control of barbarian bodies, and how people then thought about themselves. Taken together, works of Roman frontier art from northern Britain constitute a deeply-engaged conversation, both astonishingly forthright yet with an emotional nuance. They have become a marker of time and thought, with the military artists working on commissions that did not debar them from working expressively and largely on instinct, though with little sense of how each piece might turn out individually, and how later they would become viewed and read as part of a series. Some of these artworks destabilised conventional categories and suggested lively new ways of thinking about art which might otherwise have been simply taken for granted or simply ignored by adherence to classical themes, styles, and idioms. Ideologies and assumptions spawned deep within a self-absorbtion in military life were not though flung aside as if they could no longer persuade.

The forms and functions of traditional Roman narrative art could survive the disassembling of the medium from the grand scale of imperial monuments to the very local dedicatory relief. In the Roman north, the relationship between art and representation was viewed with a fresh eye, and the distorting lens of some accepted practices was rejected, allowing the making of penetrating observations based on experience and knowledge gained in almost unique conditions.

Traversing this landscape of memory involved interacting with spaces and institutions, not just the Roman army, with monuments and people, and with gods and mortals, to produce an image of a region whose contours subtly shifted as the Roman world changed over the centuries. The marks left on the landscape and in the landscape,

like musical scores or illegible writings, are traces linked to the politicisation and sometimes eroticisation of surfaces. There can be discerned a vacillation between agoraphobia and claustrophobia, possibility and constraint in other words, and in this world moments of physical and mental exhaustion must have contrasted with bursts of intense productivity. The possibilities of repetitive viewing and fragmentation through close-up available to modern viewers means that we can see in many of these artworks a kind of ‘afterimage’, a gesture to the great significance of time as a unifying theme in their creation. The artist Louise Bourgeois has spoken about memory itself as being a form of architecture, an entirely appropriate metaphor for the construction of the memory landscape in the Roman north.

Looking at the art from northern Roman Britain we see evidence of a highly-connected visual culture here, as elsewhere in Roman Britain. While the art of both parts of the province shares the same basic palette of decorative motifs and, to a lesser extent, iconographical sources the way they were used and how often they were used varied quite significantly. The evident discourse around the art from northern Roman Britain would seem to have almost been as important as the art itself. Viewed as a whole assemblage, as in this book, such art as an expression of regional identity appears as one long rush of endless surprises and what was seemingly inexhaustible creativity. This study has firmly grounded its approach to highlighting regionality in what I hope has been a methodologically-rigorous framework which does not abnegate the comparative paradigm but certainly contests its primacy. The regional approach taken in this study highlights social and cultural complexity across the whole province, and reflects in its structuring a need to understand or acknowledge that things are far more complicated than we would like them to be in studying ancient art and artefacts.

Analysing northern art allows the material to open up and give something of its character away, to provide information about context and metaphor through the finding of sometimes beautiful and powerful images in unexpected places. It was an art that seems to have intuitively channelled the equal power of restraint and exertion. Its creators seem to have sensed the importance of undermining functionality and knowledge, in order to disturb the obvious. It was a body of work in which symbolic capital related to truth. The essence of the art of northern Roman Britain to me appears to have been its vanguard mindset of constantly looking forwards, while at the same time accepting the pull of the impulse that took the form of looking to the past. This seeming impatience to reach the future required coming to terms with the present through art and visualisation. A space such as this where myth and reality intertwined spawned artworks of blatant power, but also pieces with a melancholic beauty and infused with a tremendous tenderness. The commitment of Roman visual culture in general to using culture to work towards some kind of change altered individual perceptions and enlarged the sense of possibilities on offer. At no stage in the history of northern British art itself is there a reflection of a crisis of confidence, though a creasing of certainty can often be detected. The opposite is true of those

contexts in which artworks were disposed of in a structured manner in which we might read feelings of forlorn dreams, bewilderment, impotence, and resignation, as discussed at length in Chapter Eight.

This process of disposal, of disaggregating objects, statues and other artworks, monuments in whole or in part, and even bodies, represents an attempt to use the fragment as a way of returning to the whole or even as a way of creating a new whole. I have written at length elsewhere about the significance of the fragment in relation to psychoanalytical theory and practice and how we might interpret instances of the subconscious desire to engage with the part as opposed to the whole in past societies.

The burial of the Antonine Wall legionary distance slabs and the burial and reuse of the Maryport altars represent two instances of different solutions to different problems, but at the same time the ideological value of the works would appear to have been a pre-eminent factor in the way that they were disposed of. A culture of curation and selection was married to ideological imperatives, political realities, and pragmatic decisions. Acts of appropriation such as these, a popular term today in conceptual and gallery art, would have been part of a more extended process of selection and rejection, respecting and revealing in some senses the essence of certain original artistic motivations.

These structured disposals perhaps testify to the residual condensation of memory. They could be thought of as having been part of a project involving description and documentation as pathways to illumination and understanding, a sort of creative distillation of ideological trends. Such mercurial truths were somehow linked to culture's raw power and its latent potential. The curated disposal of such artworks surely served to create the illusion that the peoples living in the empire would always survive, like these same buried relics.

Finally on the matter of journeys across the northern landscapes feeding in to the character of the art of the region and the curation of objects, it is interesting that the idea of journeying as a metaphor was in some way reflected in the imagery on the Ulysses/Odysseus vessel in the Traprain Law *haksilber* hoard. The question has previously been asked if any of the fragments of the treasure had been cut to deliberately retain certain images on the vessel surfaces. It is somewhat ironic that the exposure of Ulysses's identity on his return home after twenty years away is depicted here. Dressed as a beggar, he was not at first recognised by his wife Penelope but was recognised by his faithful dog. Did this image of Ulysses have any meaning to those beyond the frontiers of the Roman empire who might have viewed it?

Written on the Land

A perhaps more demotic type of art than that which has formed the focus of this present study is the scratching or incising of *graffiti*. A great deal of the *graffiti* from Roman Britain, as from the other provinces of the empire, is in the form of illiterate marks, much of it is in the form of written names. Certainly the deliberate marking of one's name on an item was not only a signifier of some degree of literacy on the part of the writer but was also a way of writing the self, of asserting ownership of an item, of in many cases claiming an act of vandalism for oneself, or for asserting one's membership of a group of some kind. A ground-breaking study of *graffiti* from the town of Pompeii, sadly not yet replicated for Roman Britain, has shown how *graffiti* also occasionally provided the individual with a way to literally leave his or her mark on the urban fabric, as well as on individual objects within the town. The Pompeian study suggested that the *graffiti* caricatures common on the walls of the town acted as a socio-semiotic system that operated in opposition to so-called erudite wall painting. Caricature, the study concluded, served to sometimes criticise those in positions of power, to reinforce social and class distinctions, and in general to act as an expression of self-esteem and of an individual's consuming interests and passions.

There is very little caricature *graffiti* from Roman Britain, though an interesting example is represented by a rough *graffito* drawing of a head and torso scratched into the surface of a fourth-century AD ceramic *tegula* tile recovered during excavations at Binchester fort, County Durham, and which probably represents a bored soldier's caricature cartoon of an officer supervising a work detachment at a military tilery. While this represents a subversive act, it is an act on a very small scale.

More significant are the marks left on the northern landscape by a number of soldiers from the Second and Twentieth legions seconded to quarry stone at the site of Gelt Forest, near Brampton in Cumbria, a stone source for Hadrian's Wall and its infrastructure located just over three miles south of the frontier works. The quarry face, called locally 'the Written Rock of Gelt', was first identified as bearing inscriptions in the late sixteenth century but much more recent survey work at the site directed by Jon Allison has added further inscriptions and incisions to the previously-known corpus (Figures 105 and 106). Scratched inscriptions here, really a more evolved kind of *graffiti*, date one phase of the quarrying at Gelt very precisely to AD 207, the date of a known major repair and refurbishment of the wall. As well as names of individual soldiers incised into the rock face, and sometimes their military ranks and unit names, there are incised *graffiti* drawings of a phallus, a common apotropaic symbol whose meaning and significance was discussed in an earlier chapter, a crudely-delineated face associated with a *graffito* naming the *optio* Agricola, and a caricature head and bust of a second man whose name might have been Apollonius, though only the *-onius* element of the scratched name can be read today. The name Apollonius is recorded at Comb Crag quarry, also in Cumbria, a working site much closer to Hadrian's Wall, and

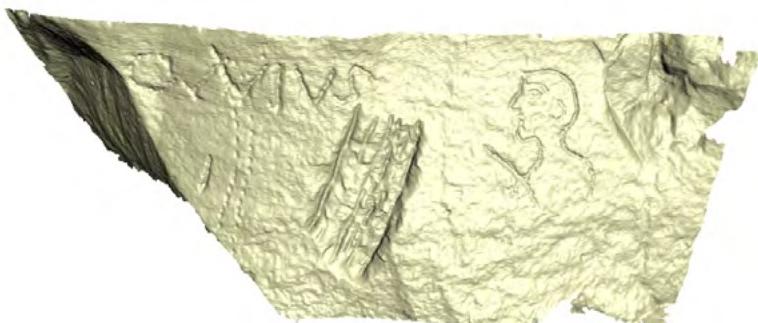


Figure 105 Graffito bust and inscription on The Written Rock of Gelt, Gelt Forest Quarry, Northumberland. 3D scan through Artec EVA. (Photo: Jon Allison).



Figure 106 Graffito bust and inscription on The Written Rock of Gelt, Gelt Forest Quarry, Northumberland. Constructed from SfM. (Photo: Jon Allison, courtesy of Historic England).

the possibility exists that we could have here two records of the presence of the same man recorded at both quarry sites.

The Gelt Forest *graffiti* evidently reflected a specific need among certain individual soldiers to record their presence at the site, possibly out of boredom, and possibly as a number of subversive acts questioning and lampooning their officers. However, it is also possible that there was also a much more noble motive for their interventions, reflecting a need to record their individual participation in a historic monumental undertaking. The fact that one of the *graffito* inscriptions appears to include the work *DEO*, suggesting a religious dedication, alerts us to the fact that there might not have been a clear-cut distinction here between secular and religious motivations among the soldiers for leaving their marks on the frontier works. The very precise dating of one *graffito* inscription, to the consulships of Aper and Maximus in AD 207, hints at a yearning by the incisor to be present in individual specificity by calling attention to the date in this manner: it represents a very specific kind of dialogue with the stone source and, by extension, with the repair of the monumental frontier works.

The concept of the frontiers of the Roman empire acting as some kind of ‘information barrier’, as first espoused by Fergus Millar, is an attractive idea. However, it would seem

that the northern British frontiers in fact acted as a locus for the display and exchange of information as mediated through art and text, as we have seen. Information about Rome, in the form of both objects and images, subsequently circulated beyond the British frontiers, even if the messages received or perceived by peoples there offered an alternative reading or different interpretation of the contemporary world and its political and ideological order.

Much of the art from northern Roman Britain existed at the intersection of landscape or locality and identity. Through the reflex of identity the people living here, many of them of course associated with the Roman military or administration, were able to strengthen their wealth of individual possibilities in the overarching unity of federated objectivities imposed by official structures. Almost inevitably this led to the ideological project becoming *visibly* what it already was *essentially*. As interventions in a landscape art reflected the desire to construct ideological situations. The situational meanings of the artworks were communicated visually to the viewer in a controlled and dense manner, so that as they revealed so they also at the same time concealed.

Defining Identity

Throughout this book it has been argued that the art of northern Roman Britain was both distinctive and in many ways reflected the character of the region in the Roman period. That is not to say that it was, for instance, inferior to the art of the Roman south-west of England whose fourth century AD cultural and artistic floruit was both astonishing and sustained, but rather that it was unique in its own way, and different due to differing ideological circumstances and the differing identities within its population, helping to create a new whole.

The complex relationships between personal or group identity and the use of images to create, maintain, or enhance that identity has been discussed at length. Perhaps it is appropriate here to discuss the identity of one individual from Catterick, North Yorkshire, found buried in the fourth century AD Grave 951 at the site of Bainesse Farm. Analysis of the skeleton suggested that this individual was a twenty to twenty-five years' old man. Had the skeleton not been anatomically sexed the grave-goods present might have suggested the opposite: that this was the burial of a young woman, wearing a jet necklace, jet bracelets, and a braided jet anklet. Two rounded pebbles had been placed inside the mouth at the time of burial. The conclusion reached by Hilary Cool who discussed the contradictory evidence for this burial in the final published academic report was that there was a possibility that the individual buried in Grave 951 could have been a *gallus*, that is a priest of the cult of the eastern goddess Cybele perhaps, priests of her cult often being required to be castrated eunuchs. Whatever the role of this individual, the archaeologists who published the final report on this burial made the decision to have produced an artist's painted impression of what this person might have looked like and this striking image by Judith Dobie (Figure 107)

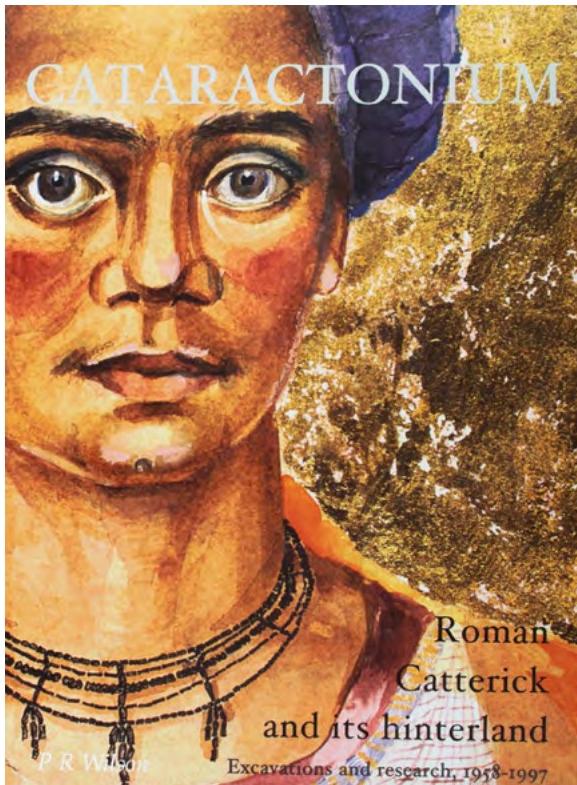


Figure 107 Screen-grab of the *gallus* illustration by Judith Dobie on the front cover of Pete Wilson's *Cataractonium Report* volume 2 (Photo: Author).

appears on the front of Volume 2 of the monograph publication. In this powerful illustration the *gallus* wears the jewellery found in the grave, bringing an imagined image of a long-dead northern Roman into modern visual culture.

In Roman literary sources the *Galli* are depicted as both strange and repulsive- ‘neither man, nor woman’ as Ovid wrote. The only epigraphic evidence so far found mentioning a *Gallus* takes the form of curse tablets dating to the end of the first century AD or the early second century from the temple to

Magna Mater (Cybele) and Isis in Mainz, Germany. The curses sought help in rendering vengeance on certain men by ‘afflicting’ them, like the castrated *Galli*. It would seem that the figure of the *gallus* in the Roman mind played a paradoxical role in reinforcing through contrast the contemporary ideal of masculine identity being linked to whole bodies, as well as beautiful bodies. The sublimated woman in man is an idea and an image that marked the sometimes *refoulé* or repressed dimension of some patriarchal cultures.

On publication of the report, unfortunately the story of the Catterick *gallus* filtered down to the national press and media where the evident nuances in the published text of the report and in the informed reconstruction drawing of the suggested priest were ignored, even by many of the more high-brow, serious newspapers, in favour of headlines that spoke of ‘Britain’s first cross-dresser’ (The Independent), ‘Crossus Dressus’ (The Daily Mail), ‘Romo-Sexual priest’ (The Daily Star) and ‘a transvestite priest’ (The Northern Echo). The power of images to inform questions of identity could not be more important today. It is good to be able to know that in the eighteen years since this concocted press furore public attitudes in Britain towards issues of gender and sex, informing identity politics, have become more liberal and accommodating.

Visions of the North

The significant concentration of sculptural artworks in northern Roman Britain of course reflected the concentrated presence of the Roman army in this region and the idea of supply and demand: something that also conversely explains the relative lack of mosaic pavements in the north, and houses or other buildings with painted frescos. The workings of the Roman army, its organisation, its administration, its religious rites required words and images to be part of the project of the fulfilment of its ideological role, as manifested in both the epigraphic habit and the use of a repertoire of images and symbols.

It is possible that the campaigns undertaken in Scotland by the Severans were commemorated in historical battle reliefs in the enormous Baths of Caracalla in Rome. Though now fragmentary, recent research has suggested that the décor of the baths included contrasting sets of reliefs depicting western victories (in Scotland or in Germany) and eastern victories (in Parthia), each set of opponents being distinguished by their ethnic appearances, friezes of specific types of captured arms and armour, and by tell-tale landscape elements that acted as a kind of shorthand to help the viewer distinguish between northern and eastern climes. This illustrates that Northern Britain would seem to have a remarkable place in the Roman imagination in the second and third centuries AD in particular.

But not all of the people in the northern region were military personnel or imperial administrators, or members of soldiers' families, and it is extremely important for us that quite a significant number of these civilians left us inscriptions and artworks and indeed artefacts which have been classed as belonging to the minor arts in this book.

To summarise, the unique profile of the art from northern Roman Britain consists of the fact that there is an unusually large-scale use of stone statuary in the region as a channel for cultural expression and the maintenance of identity (63.5% of sculpture from Roman Britain as a whole), that there is a paucity of mosaic pavements (just c.3.15% of mosaics from Roman Britain as a whole) and of buildings with painted walls, that figurines were not as significant in religious practice in the north as in the south (just 8.4% of the figurines from Roman Britain as a whole), and that the art of the north both reflected the contemporary environment and helped create it. The only other category of artwork from the northern area for which we can produce any form of quantitative assessment are intaglios or carved gemstones, 27.44% of which come from the north out of the total from Roman Britain as a whole.

The cultural significance and pure human joy in using and appreciating decoration at the time is apparent in the sheer range of material that this study has been able to draw upon, from the tiny jet bear from Malton to the huge commemorative legionary distance slab from Bridgeness. Certain significant chronological biases have also been

highlighted in the study. While attempts made here to find patterns and dominant trends will in the future be open to challenge from new discoveries and reinterpretation of particular specific pieces of evidence, the patterns and trends identified seem as if they might be secure insights for some time to come, given that the dataset from the northern region is so large and the contextual information for many of the artworks is of such high quality. While quantification cannot replace or replicate the imagination, nerves, feeling, obtuse spirit, and novelty behind the sometimes unexpected, it does help bring much-needed clarity to the interpretation of objects in an unknown land partially shut off from the light.

This northern art had its own character, but it was still Romano-British art. In northern Roman art there was no conscious attempt to subvert contemporary and dominant ideas around gender or power, but that does not mean that that did not actually happen in some instances. Rather the overall assemblage of artworks from the Roman north resembles nothing so much as a large collective insight into great forces: hypnotic in power, occasionally reiterative, unusually and quirkily dark in places, it has come into being by a process of obsessive and serendipitous accretion.

Yet in some contexts and at certain times, all that was solid melted into air. What seemed permanent soon simply became the past. If nothing else this study has shown the thick specificity of the people and places of the Roman north, and this evocation of locale appears to have been as much about the places *within* as about places *without*. Even in religious art from the region such things are apparent: a discourse relating worship to topography can be discerned in many instances, highlighting the value of an exploration of the interconnectedness of texts, buildings, and images. Meanings of artworks, when they can be confidently discerned, have been unwrapped by approaching the material with an attention to detail and context, and with a sharp awareness of incipient contradictions and resulting complexities.

For those of us who either grew up in the north or who have lived there or even visited we understand that it is a closed landscape, all of whose reference points draw us irresistibly towards the past. Though we might see things from variable angles—the individual viewing experience—or from receding perspectives-mediated by the knowledge that underpins the act of viewing—these variables nevertheless allow us to catch a glimpse of a completely novel conception of space here in the deep past, but in the end these glimpses remain no more than incoherent visions of a kind that require interpretation and careful analysis. What we are dealing with here in trying to understand and empathise with the ancient viewer moving through the Roman landscape is absence and presence in time: the absence of an object becomes a presence that one can feel and experience. Viewers did not have to simply *interpret* the world, but rather *the transformation* of that world. Thus we have to try and understand from their perspective a world which in many respects made itself.

Thus this study is not only a geography book, about a particular region, but it is also a political and ideological history, an admonition of sorts, an impassioned defence of the art produced here, and a quasi-memoir. The text, like the art, is full of mysterious eddies and cross-currents. While acknowledging the notion that the world as it is experienced is shaped by the forms of human thought and sensibility, at the same time the birth of an age of images such as in Roman times would also seem to have involved a certain degree of bewilderment at the elusiveness of time, and anxiety about the dehumanising effects of the resulting artistic production. A new art reflected a new model of existence commensurate with the experiences of living in a frontier zone, an art whose creation did not require a breaking-away from old frameworks of presentation but rather their adaption. This new art was steeped in a physical sense of the Roman north: the landscapes, the forts, the streets of tombs, the resilient peoples. But we must not forget that art and material culture mean what its users want it to mean at any period, rather than serving as an essentialising expression of cultural identity across time.

Art is always both a symptom and a solution, often too a revelation, as I believe the art of northern Roman Britain to be. History here came to shape not only iconic artworks but also the spaces between them. Ancient art may inform, delight, or even offer a kind of solace to us today, but it is also undoubtedly a tool for considering the present and our place in it. The whole experience of researching and writing this book has been a liberating one in many ways, a return home. Have I looked back to the art of the north because it has all my life looked forward towards me, though I perhaps did not know it?

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Martin Henig

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